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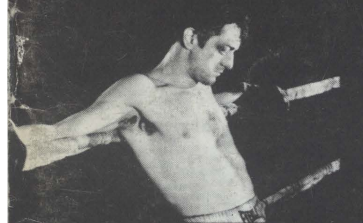
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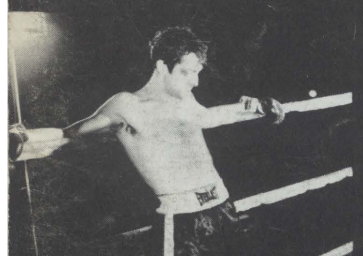
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NICHOLAS RAY: THE LAST MOVIES



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SIGHT AND SOUND is an independent critical magazine sponsored and published by the British Film Institute. It is not an organ for the expression of official BFI policy: signed articles represent the views of their authors.



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*On the cover:*  
Robert De Niro  
in Scorsese's  
'Raging Bull'.

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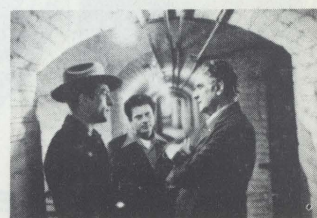
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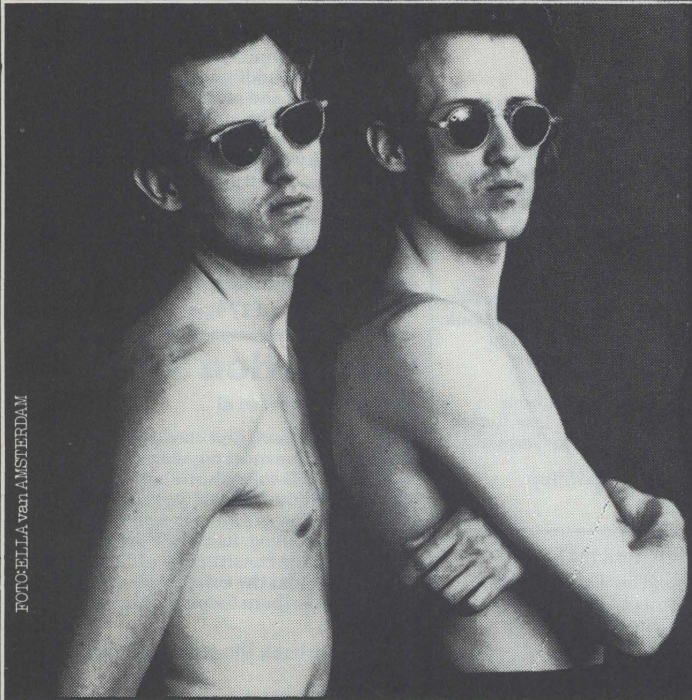


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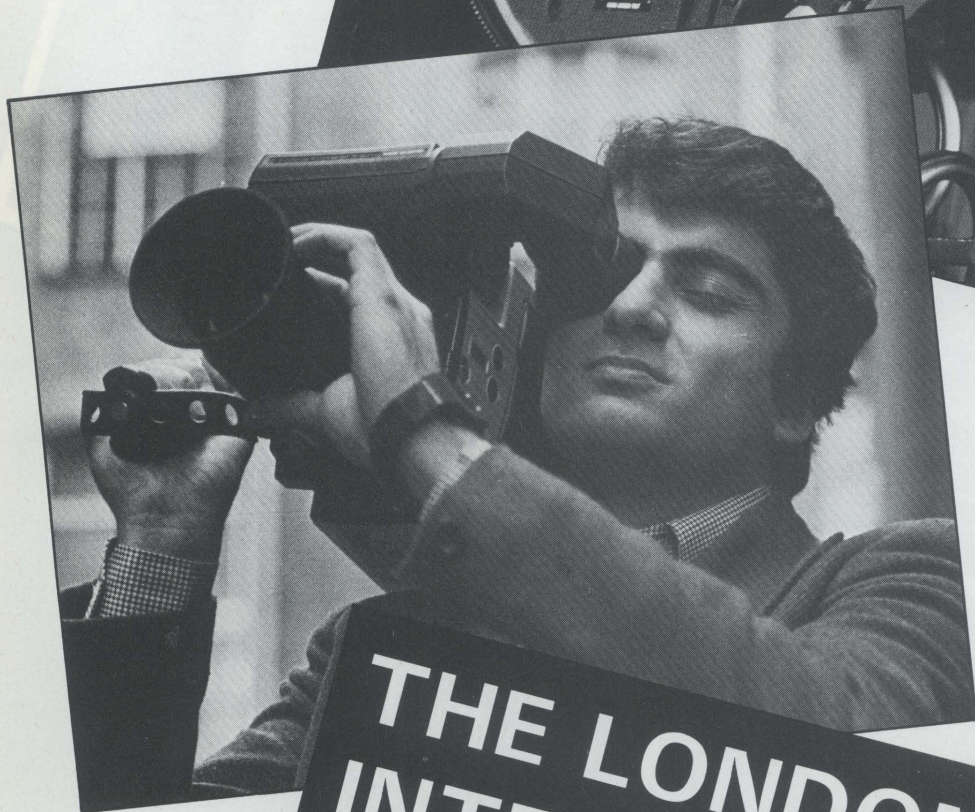
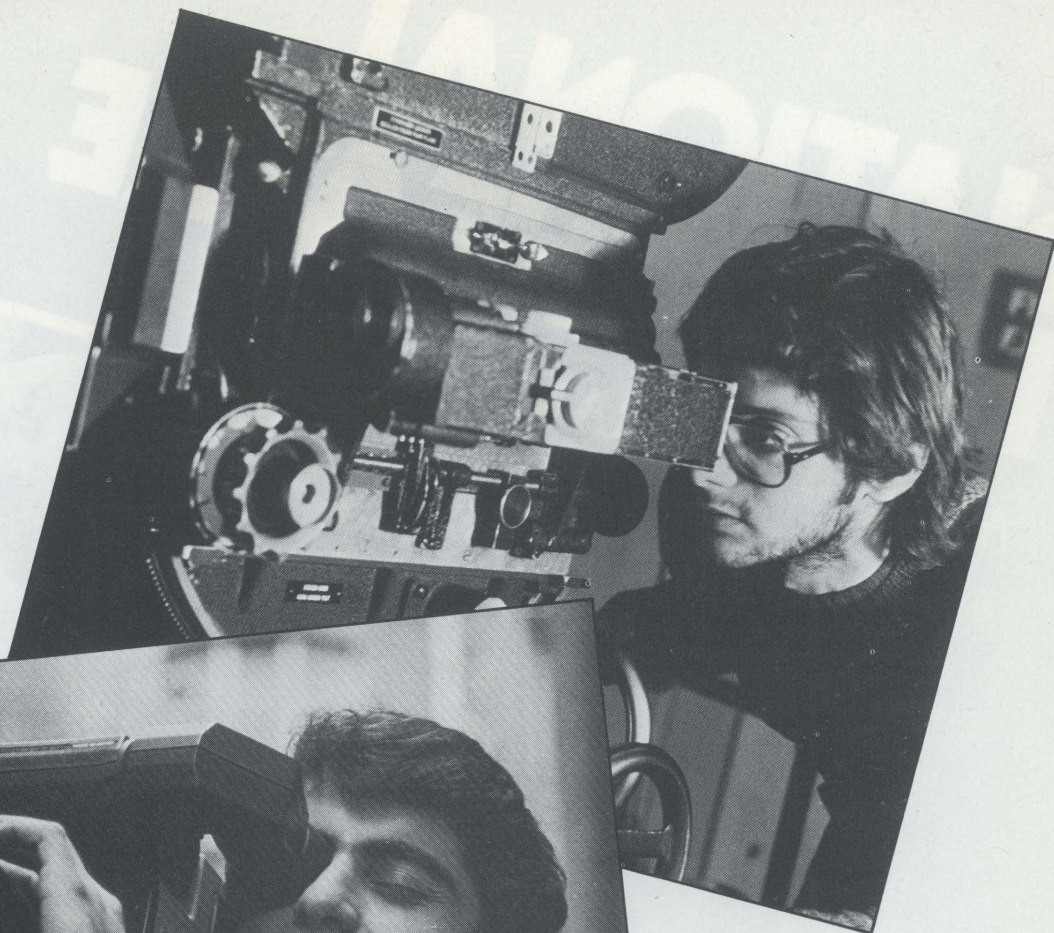
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## Delhi Festival

*A good year for the new Indian cinema*

Delhi, someone daringly told Mrs Gandhi at an official tea party she threw for delegates, is the worst place in the world to hold a film festival. Her answer is not recorded. The remark, though, will not surprise old India hands. Every other year the Government holds a competitive festival in the capital, and each time regular visitors complain that the non-competitive event, held at a variety of venues other than Delhi, is much more pleasurable. For one thing, a competitive event, in India and in January, does not make a lot of sense. The films included are inevitably the second or third best available because of the proximity of Berlin and Cannes. This year was no exception. The well-selected Information Section was full of better goods, and the Indian Panorama was much more interesting for visiting critics. Thoughts rumble on about a Third World competition instead, but wouldn't the same thing apply? An outstanding Third World film, like Guney's *The Herd*, would surely wait for a more prestigious event.

Still it was not a bad festival this year, though there were the usual alarms, including a minor riot or two and a passable scandal. The riot took place when Zoltan Fabri's *Balint Fabian Meets God* was shown to a clearly overbooked hall. Those with tickets who found others in their seats, and clearly disposed to stay there, caused it. The hastily summoned Minister of Information quelled it. And with some aplomb, one must say, since things could have got a lot more nasty.

The scandal came when Amita Malik, the *Statesman* critic, suggested that the Russian entry, which was actually Armenian, wasn't much cop but would get a prize anyway. One assumed that the presence of Grigori Chukhrai as chairman of the jury inspired the remark, and that's what he thought too. Over-reacting as only the Russians can, he put out an angry statement and eventually decided that *A Slap in the Face* couldn't be considered for a prize at all. Instead, the jury decided to split the main award between Govind Nihalani's *Cry of the Wounded*, and Rangel Vulchanov's *The Unknown Soldier's Patent Leather Shoes*, from Bulgaria. Just enough choices in most people's estimation.

*Cry of the Wounded* is a first feature by Shyam Benegal's regular cameraman, who is also second unit director on Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi*. Confidently but flashily made, it is about a villager who is falsely accused of killing his wife but



Smita Patil in Mrinal Sen's 'In Search of Famine'.

refuses to utter a word in court, despite the pleas of his counsel. It turns out that he knows justice will not be done and sees no reason to waste his breath. Local village officials did the killing and, if that comes out, his family is threatened. Some people, the film powerfully suggests, are well beyond the law and will remain so while corruption is endemic.

Not all that unlike many an American courtroom drama, *Cry of the Wounded* is important in the Indian context not only because it is audacious but because it strives hard to free itself from the ghetto of art cinema, just as Benegal's latest projects have done. That seemed to be the main thrust of the Panorama this year—move into the middle ground and fish hard for audiences. It is a commendable development but it doesn't make for purist masterpieces, as some complained.

Other films to do this with some zeal and skill were Saeed Mirza's polemical *What Makes Albert Pinto Angry?*, also in Hindi and a complete change of gear by the maker of *The Strange Tale of Arvind Desai*; Jabbar Patel's Marathi *The Throne*, another political parable set in Bombay; and Rabindra Dharmaraj's Hindi *Vicious Circle*, which attempts to accomplish for the slum-dwellers of that city what might be described as a soap opera with social intent. Each of these films proved excellent entertainment and both Mirza and Patel are clearly directors of considerable promise. Dharmaraj may be, when he sets his sights a little higher.

Mrinal Sen has had a good year internationally, with a National Film Theatre retrospective and increasing European and American interest. His new film, *In Search of Famine*, is not however quite his best. The story of a film crew who arrive, like trendy culture vultures, in a remote Bengali village to re-enact the man-made famine of 1943, only to find illusion and reality cruelly mixed, the

film seems over-schematic and contrived. As usual with Sen, the compensations are considerable in the way of individual scenes. But the surprise is that he paints the villagers so well and the film crew, director and stars with such casual brush-strokes.

It is good to know that Mani Kaul's *Rising from the Surface* is to be screened at Cannes and that some French critics, who are only now discovering Satyajit Ray, are full of praise for it. The English, one expects, will be rather more cautious in their approach to this strange, opaque film, based on the life and writings of the lauded Hindi writer Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh. Kaul ploughs a lonely furrow in the Hindi cinema. There is no formal plot, and much highly formalised film-making which strikes out against the idea of montage. It is enough to empty a good few cinemas as far as conventional excitements go. But Kaul is such a natural film-maker that even his obfuscations seem resonant, and certainly many of his images remain in the mind. He seems to identify with the loneliness and pain of Muktibodh, but his account of the writer's spiritual struggle, told through the musings of three central characters, is at times impenetrable when he is not fitting his fine images to the texts themselves. When he is, there is some remarkable work.

Next year, Bombay looks likely to host the festival. If present plans materialise, against some strenuous opposition, it will come under the wing not of the government but of the National Film Development Corporation, which has ambitious thoughts about the future. One hopes that Raghunath Raina and Bindu Batra, the festival's able and increasingly experienced directors, will keep their posts. Constant changes of management, as was once the case, are the last thing required when there are so many other imponderables to contemplate.

DEREK MALCOLM

## Waiting for 'Gandhi'

*Richard Attenborough's film has attracted backing from the Indian government and hostility from local film-makers*

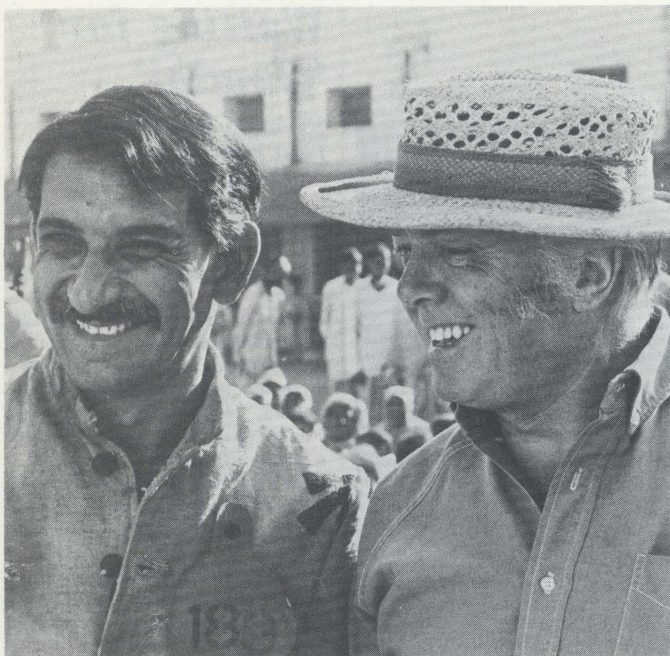
As Sir Richard Attenborough winters on the Indian sub-continent, indulging an 18-year-old obsession, he finds himself orchestrating a series of pretty awesome logistics. At 22 million dollars, *Gandhi*, with its huge Anglo-Indian cast and crew, and a six month schedule which peppers itself across several hundred miles in a variety of climates, needs more than just a modicum of luck.

The film, which was sparked off when Attenborough read Louis Fischer's biography of Gandhi in the early 60s, has been garnering local headlines like 'Gandhi film is a waste' and 'uk film a slur on Gandhi'. And, perhaps more pertinently, 'Histrionically near perfect. But is it worth a rumpus in the national kitty?' The point is that about 6.5 million dollars, a little under a third of the total budget, has been underwritten by the Indian government, to the anger of film-makers who have found great difficulty in getting backing for their own work.

This sort of opposition does tend to ruffle the normally unflappable Attenborough, who has had to live for years with a British industry which has regarded his own on-off involvement with the Gandhi project as 'a sort of running joke'. At one time or another, Rank, Fox, Paramount and Warners have all been interested. With lawyers about to draw up the contracts, Darryl Zanuck, a one-time champion of the project, was axed as president of Fox. Exit Fox. Paramount insisted on Richard Burton for the title role; Warners backed out when the Emergency was declared. The earliest runner, Rank, withdrew firmly, but not before John Davis pressed a cheque for £5,000 on Attenborough so that he could continue developing the subject. Attenborough recalls that Davis thought him 'totally insane', that 'nobody in India would let him make it', and that anyway 'nobody will want to see it.' Nevertheless, 'We have done well together,' Davis said. 'If you set it up, I would like you to repay us; if not, then you needn't bother.' The cheque was repaid a number of years ago.

'I have never thought that I wouldn't do it,' Attenborough says. 'At various times I have been as close as dammit, and at various times, just on the financing, it has fallen to the ground. The result has been that several times I have been practically bust—had to mortgage my house,





Ben Kingsley, who plays Gandhi, with Richard Attenborough.  
Photograph: Frank Connor

all that sort of thing. But everything I have done in directing, really from *Oh! What a Lovely War*, has been a sort of training to do this picture. I didn't want to direct *per se*, I wanted to make *Gandhi*.'

Such single-mindedness was bound to pay off eventually. Some seventeen years after Nehru first announced that the Indian government would grant the project every co-operation, backing finally materialised in the rather unlikely form of City institution finance, from a consortium including names like Pearson Longman and Lazards. For their part, they were impressed that Attenborough had tied up an assurance about a healthy slice of rupee funding as well as getting some optimistic soundings from the American distributors, who seemed to love the project now that someone else was putting up the bulk of the investment.

Last year, Mrs Indira Gandhi asked Attenborough whether, after all these years, he was going to make the film and what, if anything, was now holding him up. He told her he had '80 per cent of the finance but not all the rupees', and the result was a Government plan to help out, though he had never pressed for Indian involvement on this scale. The Government would not put up money itself, but would float a company, in partnership with the National Film Development Corporation, and invite subscription from institutional and private finance. If there was a gap in the film's financing, it could then choose to put in some money. Knowing the problems of independent film-makers, Attenborough urged that no rupees should come to him which would normally go to indigenous production through the NFDC, and that any profit accruing to the NFDC

share of the investment should be recycled into Indian production. 'It seemed to me that I was behaving perfectly properly towards Indian film-makers. In opposing the picture, they are not recognising that it could, in fact, greatly increase the amount of money that would be available to them.'

Attenborough summarises his problems as 'Finance, India, casting and script.' He was determined that he could not embark on a production of this size without making sure that, in a country which almost suffocates under red tape, there was trust between the production company and the various bodies responsible for the necessary permissions. As far as casting is concerned: 'I don't think we could have found our Indian actors in 1963, or even for that matter 1970. The style of acting of the Bombay movies has no connection with Benegal, Sen and Ray. Ray and the others have been responsible for a whole new, naturalistic style of acting in Indian movies—a style that we in the West take as the norm.' As for the casting of Gandhi himself, names that cropped up and fell by the wayside included Anthony Hopkins, Tom Courtenay, John Hurt, Albert Finney, Dustin Hoffman. But Attenborough felt that, 'The time one could have x-number of our smashing actors dressed up with brown skins and goatee beards was no longer with us.' He had had 'a sneaking feeling' about Ben Kingsley ever since seeing him in Peter Brook's *Midsummer Night's Dream*. So Kingsley it was to be; and how fortuitous that he should turn out to be Anglo-Indian.

There have been three main scripts—from Gerald Hanley, Robert Bolt, and now the final one from Jack Briley. 'I think there's no question that if Bob Bolt hadn't suffered a stroke I

would have gone back to him, because he had written the penultimate script,' Attenborough says. 'As it turns out, Jack has written, in my opinion, a totally brilliant and original screenplay.' And he is anxious to point out that, contrary to speculation, there has been no Government tampering with the script.

The local film-makers who have been most vocal in their condemnation of the financial support for *Gandhi* feel that their quarrel is with the Indian government. A leading light among the group is Govind Nihalani, prize winner at Delhi with *Cry of the Wounded*, who by a delicious irony just happens to be *Gandhi*'s second unit director-cameraman. Nihalani, a child of Partition ('my first memory was of fighting, of violence and of panic'), worked as a cameraman with Shyam Benegal before setting up his own first feature at a cost of a little over £50,000, or around half the budget for costume hire alone on *Gandhi*. The film is a 16mm blow-up; Nihalani acted as his own cameraman; and it is proving a real box-office winner. 'No film backed by the NFDC has succeeded like this for about the last ten years,' Nihalani claims. 'It has given new impetus to the Corporation. We'll be paying back our loan from the Government in full, with interest.'

The demand from Nihalani and film-makers like him is that facilities of institutional finance, similar to those offered to *Gandhi*, should be available to them, and that the Government could also take up responsibility for distribution. ('So far, when we have made our demands, the Government says it has no money; now, suddenly, there is money for a project in which the Government is a partner.') It appears that their campaign is making progress—at least to the point where Nihalani can comment that recent policy decisions taken in the NFDC make serious film-making in India 'the easiest in the world, certainly in terms of the creative freedom we can enjoy.' Working on his first Western production, and marvelling at its organisation and disci-

pline, Nihalani also feels that the experience will leave something behind. 'Most of the local people employed on this unit are young; my unit, for example, are people who are open to new ideas. The experience will have been too intense, too gruelling, not to have left its impact, in the best possible sense.'

QUENTIN FALK

## Workers '80

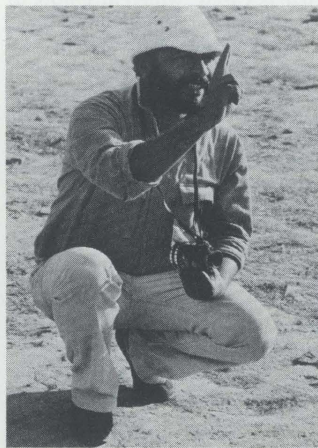
*A report on the film record of the Gdansk negotiations, a documentary which is not for export*

Some time after the strikes had begun in the Gdansk shipyards last summer, a team of Polish film-makers entered the Lenin dockyards and made a record of the negotiations that were then in progress. The result of the accumulated footage is the relatively polished and dramatically fascinating *Robotnicy '80* (*Workers '80*), which already rates as one of Poland's most significant recent films in terms of the direct insight it offers into the events surrounding the continuing crisis. If it ever legally reaches the West then we can be sure that real liberalisation has occurred. At present that possibility is nil. Such a film could not even be contemplated in other Soviet satellite states, never mind produced.

*Robotnicy '80* and the manner of its distribution is a sign of the temporarily confused state of Polish censorship. It was to go on release in December 1980, but was prevented from doing so by, reliable sources state, the current number two man in Poland, Olszowski. Under instruction from the highest levels of government the Ministry of Culture stopped the film. The only way of viewing it now is through local/regional Solidarity exerting pressure to have it screened to factories and other workplaces, including universities. With difficulty it can be seen; as with all types of cultural products the government faces immense pressure to permit total frankness of expression, and the best it can do to prevent such pressure is to drag its feet, as with this film.

An example of this process of offering half measures concerns another recent film. On 16 December in Gdansk, the huge memorial to the victims of the security forces killed in 1970 was 'unveiled' to a large crowd. A film crew was there, shooting the event. When they returned to their base to edit the footage, they were instructed to shelve the project—once again this instruction stemming from the highest governmental levels.

*Robotnicy '80* runs for 96 minutes, is black and white, and focuses on the negotiating table



Govind Nihalani. Photo: Frank Connor



between Solidarity and the government representatives during the few weeks before the signing of the agreement. In retrospect the film concludes on a painfully ironic moment, with the signing, and Walesa's jubilant speech to thousands of people outside the shipyard. Ironic simply because the government has yet to implement seventeen of the proposals that it agreed to then. The occasional rough editing just adds to the audience's awareness of the novelty of the whole enterprise—watching ordinary workers intellectually outwit and morally embarrass figures who once would have ignored them.

The film opens with shots of the shipyard and brief interviews with workers occupying the yards. The film crew were not present right from the first day, and since the film has no voice-over, no titling (except brief ones indicating who the in-frame speakers are), it's not made precisely clear when they started filming. But it moves rapidly from the interviews to the negotiating table, set in what looks like a recreation room in a drab office building. As with many good documentaries, it's the personalities involved who come to dominate the film. The main participants for Solidarity are Lech Walesa and Andrzej Gwiazda, the latter coming across as serious and radical, the former as genuinely witty and shrewdly intelligent. For the government one person stands out and seems to have shouldered most of the burden—Mieczyslaw Jagielski, then deputy prime minister but since promoted, and probably one of the most intelligent men in the Polish government. Most of the government team seem uncomfortably aware of the camera's presence, unlike the relaxed Solidarity delegation. Jagielski especially comes across as being under immense strain.

During the film there are cuts away from the discussions to the hall of delegates outside the inner sanctum, delegates from across Poland. Shots of sleeping strikers, strikers bringing in food supplies, strikers attending Mass and confession in the yards, and people grabbing news-sheets through the shipyard railings. It's almost a cinematic handbook for the internal organisation of an occupation and negotiation. We see the production of news bulletins on crude print machines, and the system of passes permitting people to enter the shipyard.

But the largest and most important segment involves a virtually stationary camera at one end of the negotiating table, zooming in occasionally to pick out speakers, panning slightly to bring other people into frame. To left of screen sit the Solidarity delegation, with microphones placed in front of each speaker, relaying the discussion via a tannoy system to the shipyard. In many respects the film is bitterly,

and on the government side unwittingly, amusing, through the nuances of dialogue and veiled references to the background to the strikes.

At the start Jagielski waves a copy of the Polish constitution and declares that this already covers all the demands for the strikers. Gwiazda replies that the constitution perhaps had noble intentions but now it's just a bit of paper. On the demands for greater religious tolerance Jagielski airily proclaims that 'party members go to church too', with much audience laughter since this widely known fact would normally be virulently denied by any party official. At another point he invites the Solidarity leaders for talks in Warsaw, which they refuse, along with his offer of government typewriters to speed up the typing of the final document—again to guffaws from the audience I was among. The collapse of the 1970 Gdansk strike was partly due to the fact that the leaders left the shipyard occupation, and became isolated, and who knows just what 'accident' might befall the agreement between leaving the table and being typed up by party typists in Warsaw.

*Robotnicy '80* shows that the government tactics were extremely simple—to give way on nothing without arguing it into the ground. It's no coincidence that similar crude methods were being employed five months after the film was made, in the refusal to implement most of the signed agreement. But the film also gives the essence of the strikers' case, hinting as it does at the pitiful material conditions of life of the vast majority, with shots of workers chewing grimly on bits of unappetising sandwich as they listen to the discussion. More than that, the film is laden with reference to the centrality of the Church in the consciousness of the mass of workers occupying the yard, with shots of the Pope's picture and priests conducting prayers and masses. If *Robotnicy '80* were a 1930s Soviet film then the bosses would artificially stand out as repellent, stupid, and well-fed. It seems too much of a coincidence that several of the government team actually are grossly overweight—an instance of reality confirming ideology.

Were it released as a commercial venture, the film would probably sweep all box-office records—several hundred people crammed into the huge cinema when I saw it, at an absurdly early hour in the morning. As it is, it may soon disappear completely from circulation within Poland, and it's a hopeless dream that such an indictment of the current authorities may ever reach cinemas in Britain. So far Walesa's flamboyant gesture and speech at the end of the film remain symbols of unrealised hope.

GUSTAW MOSZCZ



Kay Pollak's 'Children's Island', from Sweden.

## Nordic Encounters

*Offerings at Lübeck and Hanasaari suggest that Scandinavian cinema is back on form*

Ingmar Bergman's exile in West Germany has symbolised a depressing period in Nordic cinema. Judging, however, from the films shown at two festivals last winter, prospects look rosier. Film-makers developing projects are better endowed and work in more civilised conditions in Sweden and Denmark than almost anywhere else in Europe; and in 1981, the Finnish Film Foundation, under Jörn Donner, will inject some 10 million marks (over £1 million) into domestic production. Even Iceland is stirring into activity, with two engaging features to its credit in 1980.

For more than twenty years the Nordic Film Days have taken place in November, in the Hanseatic city of Lübeck, the purpose being to offer an objective foreign audience a sample of the year's Nordic films. As well as shorts, there are features from Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland and Iceland; and a bonus is the retrospective section, zealously assembled by Hauke Lange-Fuchs (the sort of man who can arrange a screening of Bergman's early soap commercials at an hour's notice). In 1980, the retrospective theme was 'The Second World War in the Scandinavian Film'. No masterpieces came to light, even if Edvin Laine's *The Unknown Soldier* survives as a craggy monument to Finnish courage; and yet the sociological pressures on Norwegians, Finns, Danes and even neutral Swedes did emerge from beneath the movie conven-

tions of the 40s. It was interesting, too, to be reminded of changing attitudes: in 1967, the Occupation of Denmark could be described by Palle Kjaerulff-Schmidt in *Once There Was a War* in almost nostalgic terms.

The second Nordic festival took place two months later just outside Helsinki in the comfortable Swedish-Finnish Cultural Centre at Hanasaari. One feared a sense of *déjà vu*. But Ari Tolppanen and his fellow-organisers assembled an entirely different set of films, complementing those shown at Lübeck. Buyers and sellers were present in force, dealing with one another in a positive manner all too rare in Nordic film circles, where national and linguistic prejudices still pertain. There was much talk of partnership in production and promotion of Scandinavian cinema; and such plans were the more promising for being laid in the soothing saunas of Hanasaari, a neutral site where the Swedes could not be accused of imposing their somewhat avuncular patronage.

Each of the major countries contributed four features. Several were insignificant, and the standard of Norwegian cinema remains obstinately mediocre. Finland, however, showed three films worth attention at any festival: *Firebrand*, directed by Pirjo Honkasalo and Pekka Lehto; *Night by the Seashore*, from Finland's most socially concerned film-maker, Erko Kivikoski; and *Milka—A Film About Taboos*, by Rauni Mollberg, whose *Earth Is Our Sinful Song* made such an impact in the 70s. Each is unmistakably Finnish in identity and texture, and each might possibly exasperate foreign audiences unfamiliar with Finnish ways.

In *Firebrand*, though, one sees a visual verve, a way of taking history by the throat and holding



it aloft in a grand gesture reminiscent of Paradjanov. In Kivikoski's film there is an authentic mood of *Kammerspiel* and long stretches of aching, accurate dialogue. And Mollberg brings to *Milka* a massive, some might say ponderous, control of pace and inflection: Lappland was never before quite so grim, quite so remote.

The Danish cinema is also vigorously alive. *Johnny Larsen*, directed by Morten Arnfred and charting a young man's emotional and social difficulties during the 50s, was a great success with the German public at Lübeck. And the analysis of a woman's reactions, and those of her family, to the onset of cancer in early life, in Astrid Henning-Jensen's *The Moment*, breathes a wisdom and warm acceptance of misfortune that surely stems from the director's long devotion to the documentary. *Thomas—A Child Out of Reach* lacks the fictional relief and cathartic structure of *The Moment*, but recalls *Warrendale* and *Best Boy* in its unblinking stare at a terrible human predicament: the actress Lone Hertz and her efforts to educate her retarded son. There is neither release nor accomplishment in sight. The value of Lone Hertz's striving (and of the film) lies in a refusal to abandon hope.

*Land and Sons*, the first 35mm feature produced in Iceland, uses the country's strange volcanic scenery to considerable effect. Set in the 30s, the film dwells on the determination of a young farmer to break free of his ancestral estate and head for the prosperity and sophistication of city life. Agust Gudmundsson has an eye for figures in a landscape: the physical dimensions of life are always to hand; so too is the flavour of a quaint, doomed romance.

More than twenty films were made last year in Sweden, where the cinema is fast resembling a

plum tree that might be prolific but yields indifferent fruit. Everyone wants to make a feature in Sweden; few have the talent. One aberration glimpsed at Hanasaari was *The Man Who Went Up in Smoke*, directed by a Hungarian, Peter Bacsó, from a thriller by Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö. The dialogue is recorded in an English of the kind practised with such breathless formality by Dick Barton on those radio shows of the 40s and 50s. Derek Jacobi unhappily impersonates the detective Martin Beck. Such co-productions continue to seduce the Swedish film authorities, but please neither public nor critics.

By contrast, two studies of adolescence spring from the shadows of Swedish life, and were justly praised. The more cinematically complex is Kay Pollak's *Children's Island*, about the son of a broken marriage who fends for himself during the long Stockholm summer and, with often terrifying consequences, tries to roll back the frontiers of experience. Pollak's choice of music, camera position and locale combine to encourage the spectator's participation: one empathises, disturbingly, with this tart youngster.

Karsten Wedel's *I Am Maria* is a more passive film, told from its heroine's viewpoint. Maria is sent to stay with people she barely knows in a town outside Stockholm. She makes friends with a drunken recluse, a lonely artist who is ostracised by the other inhabitants but who recognises in the unspoiled girl something of the innocence he himself has lost. Wedel is a documentarist, and his depiction of the provincial milieu is impeccable.

Perhaps the most enjoyable film shown at these festivals was a version of Brecht's *Herr Puntila and his Servant Matti*, written in 1940 while Brecht, a refugee from the Nazis, was staying at the country estate of the Finnish

authoress Hella Wuolijoki. Directed by the gifted stage producer Ralf Långbacka, and with Lasse Pöysti as a roistering, domineering Puntila, the film is as bright as a new penny. Its crackling dialogue and cheerful performances cannot, however, mask the loneliness that lies behind every Nordic drunkard. Hella Wuolijoki's contribution imbues the piece with a marvellous awareness of the Finnish landscape.

So perhaps the mood is brightening. Bergman is coming home this year to shoot a five-hour TV film, *Fanny and Alexander*. Jan Troell has at last begun principal photography on an epic tailored to his talents, an account of Andrée's doomed quest for the North Pole in a hydrogen gas balloon in 1897. Although these two massive productions will stretch the resources of even the bountiful Swedes, there's hope that they may herald a much-needed renaissance in Nordic cinema.

PETER COWIE

## Hitch in 3D

*Looking at an old master with polaroid glasses*

The history of 3D in film is still largely unacknowledged. But as long as there have been movies, there have been experimenters trying to add that elusive extra dimension: William Friese-Greene, the Lumières and Edwin S. Porter all dabbled in it. Hitchcock's *Dial M for Murder*, shot during Hollywood's brief fling with the process in 1953 but never shown in 3D, is one intriguing fragment of that history which has recently come to light. Warner Brothers, apparently, were unaware they even had a 3D print, until one was discovered in 1979 with cans marked left and

right for stereoscopic projection. At the instigation of a Ms M. J. Peckos of the company's newly formed Classics Division, it was shown at the Tiffany theatre in Los Angeles, and then as part of a successful 3D season (including the similarly unexposed *Kiss Me Kate*) at the 8th Street Playhouse in New York.

At the beginning of 1981, *Dial M* opened a 3D season at the Detroit Institute of Arts, and in six performances set a house record of 7,000. According to programme director Elliot Wilhelm, Warners provided a brand new copy, printed one frame at a time (due to variable shrinkage of the two negatives), at twice to three times the normal cost. The Institute paid for a motor to run their two projectors simultaneously, polaroid glasses, and a silver-coated screen because of the light loss in 3D projection and viewing. Says Wilhelm, 'I know why 3D died. Theatre exhibitors couldn't stand it any more. It is the world's biggest headache. When MGM sent the Institute an unsynchronised print of *Kiss Me Kate*, it took eight hours to synchronise.'

Of the extra-dimensional Hitchcock, Andrew Sarris has reportedly been highly enamoured. But it looks as if the Master—who never expressed much enthusiasm for the process—has simply covered his tracks very well. By sticking close to his theatrical property, and the Maida Vale flat where tennis champ Ray Milland tries twice to frame his wife—as murder victim and then as murderess—he actually calls into question whether 3D added more reality or more artifice. The claustrophobia of the setting is emphasised by the way bottles on a sideboard, lampshades and bric-à-brac dominate a separate foreground plane. But the effect does not seem inherently more meaningful than the attention Hitchcock usually paid to objects as part of a two-dimensional design. The one predictably striking moment—Grace Kelly's hand flung back, imploring our help and reaching for a weapon—might be interpreted as a complex Hitchcockian provocation, indicting the audience's voyeuristic complicity. But it is hard to know if it is the limitations of the material or the technique which render a recent interpretation of this expanded space in *Film Comment* a trifle tendentious: 'Hitchcock seems to be suggesting the overwhelming dominance of possessions, or just plain junk, over emotions in his characters' lives.' Some typical interplay of objective/subjective shots also has an added frisson in 3D, but mainly facilitates the dramatic conventions of the original play, giving us, as it were, greater theatrical reality. One might also note that the Master's notorious process work shimmers even more outrageously in 3D.

RICHARD COMBS



Grace Kelly, corpse and three-dimensional effect in 'Dial M for Murder'.





Michel Khleifi's 'The Fertile Memory'.

## Days of Carthage

*New Arabic and African films at the eighth Journées de Carthage*

The list of films with Tunisian locations is extensive—twenty-five or so in the last ten years, including *Star Wars*, *Jesus of Nazareth* and *Life of Brian*. Sadly, the list of Tunisian productions in the same period is no more than half as long. And while these foreign films usefully bring money into the country, very little of that income, if any, finds its way into the Tunisian film industry. Indeed recently a Franco-Tunisian co-production, which would have brought not only foreign currency but also experience to Tunisian technicians, had its authority to film in Tunisia rescinded two days before shooting was due to begin.

Ironically, however, Tunisia sponsors one of the most important film festivals in the Arab and African world. The Journées Cinématographiques de Carthage, initiated in 1966 by Tahar Chérifa, takes place every two years and in November 1980 held its eighth session. Only one Tunisian film was ready, but Algeria, Iraq, Morocco, Niger, Mauritania, Palestine and Senegal were all represented.

The Senegalese *Fad Jal*, directed by Safi Faye, utilises both dramatisation and documentary to tell the history of Faye's family, through her grandfather's account and their re-enactment of it, in relation to village life now and the problems facing the people because of newly enforced state control of land. The treatment is not of the kind one expects from ethnographic films, with their tendency to isolate traditional culture from its con-

temporary social context. A more conventional example, *Fitampoha* (Madagascar), by Jean-Claude Rahaga and Jacques Lombard, documents a traditional ceremony around the cleansing of sacred objects practised only once every ten years, and perhaps never to be repeated again except through this film.

Mozambique's *Mueda—Memory and Massacre* by Rui Guerra is also a historical document, not of a threatened past but of history in the making. When the villagers of Mueda asked for independence in 1960, six hundred of them were massacred. Each year the survivors recreate the events through a village drama, and the film was therefore shot over only three days. This is clearly a difficult project, and made more so because of the transference from a village-based drama to a more widely distributable film, where the sense of involvement on the part of the audience is not the same, nor the specific meaning so immediately apparent.

Med Hondo's *West Indies* (Mauritania) is also concerned with historical re-enactment (in the double sense that includes the rewriting of history from the other side), but the appeal is to a more wide-reaching experience. The drama deals with the effects of colonisation in the Caribbean and is filmed on a slave ship set constructed in an enormous disused Citroën factory in Paris. The camera weaves back and forth through the various sections, which become a Caribbean port, a plantation house drawing-room, a Paris street, a dance hall or a slave hold, against which a strikingly lit and richly costumed dance opera is staged.

Prize giving at a festival like Carthage must be a nightmare, involving questions not only of cinema but of politics. To deny this would be to deny the point of the festival—which, among its

special homages, included one to the Palestinian cinema. The Palestinian film in competition, Michel Khleifi's *The Fertile Memory*, won not only the critics' prize but also the prize for a first film. Khleifi has interviewed two Palestinian women living under occupation in Israel, with two different experiences of the same historical situation.

But the clear winner of the day, awarded the Tanit d'Or, was the Tunisian-Algerian co-production *Aziza*, by Abdellatif Ben Ammar. This first feature from Tunisia for nearly three years witnesses the decline of traditional family life in the face of modernisation, foreign capital and independence for women able for the first time to earn their own living. It might be unjust to suggest that *Aziza* somehow represents in microcosm what is happening not only to Tunisia—through tourism especially—but more specifically to the Tunisian film industry. There is something ironic about so many foreign films following the trail of a frozen notion of 'Arabian nights', while those filmmakers who could produce the more authentic images of this part of the Arab world are stifled by lack of funds and support.

ANGELA MARTIN

## Rarer than a Roman villa

*London's Electric Cinema Club, a beacon of the alternative cinema, marks an anniversary*

Seventy years ago this February, the Notting Hill Electric Cinema Theatre—now, it is claimed, the oldest purpose-built cinema in England—opened with a film of Sir Herbert Tree's stage performance of *Henry VIII* at His Majesty's, Haymarket. Although admission is no longer 3d and a bun and an orange are no longer served free in all parts, the Electric's present occupants are distri-

buting a free tabloid history of the cinema. During the First World War, the building was stoned after the German manager was suspected of signalling to Zeppelins from the roof; a later manager had a glue factory on the side and accepted cods' heads for the price of admission; the mass murderer John Christie was a projectionist in the 40s.

Today, the architect Gerald Seymour Valentin's terracotta tiled entrance, with its box-office invitingly open to the Portobello Road, and his barrel-vaulted interior and gas lighting remain substantially unaltered. In the 20s, the Imperial, as the Electric was renamed, was soon—having been built so early—an outdated 600-seater. It nevertheless survived until the 50s on a reasonably profitable diet of double-bills changed three times a week. The fabric deteriorated, however, until it became, in the words of its chroniclers, 'a flea-pit on the grandest scale'.

The cinema was saved in the late 60s by a group of enthusiasts, the Electric Cinema Club, which hired the building for an adventurous programme of late-night screenings. Their first film was Buñuel's *The Criminal Life of Archibaldo de la Cruz*. 'The heating was non-existent; if you sat on the wrong seat the whole row would collapse; when it rained half the cinema had to be roped off; the projection was erratic and the old clientèle apparently impervious to anything.' The club prospered, and in 1970 assumed overall control. The current repertory programme, supervised by Peter Howden, is a judicious, highly personal mix of genre classics, the forgotten and the perverse. In the last two years, the club has spent £50,000 on new equipment. Annual membership stands at 13,000. A cinema similar to the Electric but now a warehouse was described recently by an architectural writer as typical of buildings 'now rarer than a Roman villa' in Britain.

JOHN PYM



The barrel-vaulted interior of the seventy-year-old Electric Cinema.



# HOLLYWOOD'S

Dennis Stanfill, chairman of Twentieth Century-Fox, gave Hollywood its most unwelcome present in years last Christmas. In a speech to the Los Angeles World Affairs Council on 23 December, he predicted that, at the current rate of increase, the average cost of motion pictures would be \$25m by 1985 (\$14m to make and \$11m to market). This compares with an average all-in cost of \$16½m today. It is a grim prospect for the movie majors. Thanks to expenditure on promotion, prints, shipping, etc, films need to generate up to three times their original (or negative) cost to break even. Fewer than forty films in the history of the cinema have returned in excess of \$50m to their distributors from the North American market. If Stanfill is right, Hollywood would be headed on a disaster course, in which almost none of its films could hope to make a profit.

It has been down this path before. In the late 1960s, there was a sudden eruption of (for the times) very expensive pictures. Many failed miserably at the box-office, prompting a period of drastic retrenchment in the early 70s. Between 1971 and 1975, no film was allowed to cost more than \$15m; many were held at \$10m or less. Beginning with *King Kong* in 1976, however, the bad habits of overspending were resumed. Since then, 29 films costing more than \$20m apiece have been made. Many have already been consigned to the no-hope basket, but at present more than \$300m is riding on 11 pictures for release in 1981. That is big money to be committed to so few movies, especially when it costs 20 per cent or more to finance.

Why did the film industry permit costs to spiral in this way? Because it persuaded itself that changes in the manner in which films are financed had turned a formerly speculative business into one that was as safe as houses. Much of the risk element in movies was 'laid off' on outside investors through advance guarantees from theatre owners and television stations, who effectively underwrote the cost of production, often before a foot of film had been shot. The supposed elimination of the so-called 'downside risk' in film-making encouraged the majors to step up production and to pay scant regard to how much money was being spent—at the end of the day somebody else would foot the bill. It also attracted into the film business names never before associated with movies—like *Reader's Digest*, Time Inc, Lorimar and the television networks ABC and CBS. All believed that, thanks to advance commitments from outsiders, it was almost impossible to lose money from film production.

The assumptions underlying this attitude fell apart spectacularly last November, when United Artists rushed its \$36m Western *Heaven's Gate* into the New York cinemas as the first step in a campaign aimed at sweeping the board

## ALAN STANBROOK



*'Heaven's Gate': Isabelle Huppert, Kris Kristofferson.*

at the next Oscar ceremonies. *Heaven's Gate* came with all the right credentials—an epic theme (the Johnson County range wars seen as an episode in the class struggle), beautiful photography (by Vilmos Zsigmond) and a director (Michael Cimino) who had already had one big critical and Oscar-winning success in *The Deer Hunter*. If, in the end, *Heaven's Gate* had cost three times its original budget of \$11.6m, that was a small consideration—theatre owners and the networks would pick up the tab.

But it did not work out like that. *Heaven's Gate* took an almost unprecedented critical beating. Cimino's 219-minute film was slaughtered in almost all departments. Script, acting and direction were found to be incoherent, and in the *New York Times*, the influential Vincent Canby described it as 'something quite rare in movies these days—an unqualified disaster.' Few people will ever know whether the verdict was justified for, within days of the opening, a shell-shocked Michael Cimino asked United Artists to withdraw the film from distribution for re-editing down to a more commercially acceptable length of 120–150 minutes. Among the casualties will be a special prologue and epilogue that Cimino had added to the film at a cost of \$5m.

Pulling *Heaven's Gate* from distribution caused all sorts of problems. Among the least was that it could not open in Los Angeles in time to qualify for the Academy Awards. Much more serious was that theatre owners all down the line were left with empty slots in their schedules. Those that had counted on it as a Christmas attraction were too late to bid for other products and had to keep their

screens dark or substitute re-runs at one of the most lucrative seasons of the year. Since United Artists appeared to have broken its contract to supply the film, it was reckoned to be vulnerable to legal actions from fuming exhibitors.

One result of the fiasco is that the system of up-front cash guarantees, on which distributors had come to rely, will be called into question. Theatre owners in 19 states have already succeeded in obtaining legislation to ban sight-unseen bidding for uncompleted movies. Eighteen other states are expected to follow suit.

In the week it played in Manhattan, *Heaven's Gate* grossed only \$38,000. Transamerica Corporation, the conglomerate that owns United Artists, admits that the film now has no hope of recovering its cost and has written off an as yet undisclosed part of it in its books. During re-editing, which will itself cost up to \$1m, frightening interest charges will be clocking up on the original \$36m investment. Awkward questions are also starting to be asked about how the company allowed itself to become so exposed on a single film. United Artists also backed Francis Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, but more than half the \$31m cost of that picture was shouldered by Coppola himself.

United Artists' involvement with the Cimino project epitomises all that makes Wall Street despair of the film industry. When first mooted, *Heaven's Gate* was a relatively modest \$7.6m Western that was nevertheless turned down by the company's then bosses, Arthur Krim and Eric Pleskow, because Westerns were out of fashion. Then, in 1978, Krim and Pleskow left United Artists to join an independent company, Orion Pictures. Cimino, now with an Oscar to his credit, tried again and got a more receptive hearing from United Artists' new managers, Andy Albeck and James Harvey.

Cimino was given \$11.6m to make the picture and left to his own devices. Before shooting was half completed, perfectionism (including a reputed fifty takes of some shots) had swallowed up the budget. Accountants were flown post-haste to Montana, where the film was being shot, and reported that *Heaven's Gate* would cost \$50m to complete. Andy Albeck, then president of United Artists, disbelieved them and took a trip to Montana himself. His estimate of the cost to completion was \$30m, much nearer the eventual cost of \$36m.

He had to decide whether to call a halt at that point or plough in extra money in the hope that all would come right in the end. *Jaws* and *Star Wars* had both overrun their budgets, but ultimately became the two most profitable films of all time. Albeck elected to give Cimino his head. Not until the film was nearly completed, after eighteen months in production, did the studio heads have a chance to see the



# CRASHING EPICS

first, five-hour rough cut. They gulped at what they saw, but put a brave face to the world. 'The film's scope is so magnificent,' they said, 'its intentions so noble, that once the proposed editing takes place, it is likely to be a masterpiece.' Paperback book publishers, to whom the script was offered as a film tie-in, were more sceptical. They all rejected it.

Cimino blames the débâcle on the unseemly haste with which a very long picture was edited against the clock in order to meet pre-arranged release dates. In a letter to Andy Albeck, subsequently published in the Hollywood trade papers, he wrote: 'Forgoing the usual time-tested work-in-progress previews, we were able to meet our commitment to exhibitors. It is painfully obvious to me that the pressures of this schedule and the missing crucial step of public previews clouded my perception of the film.' And he asked for time to complete the picture with the same care and attention with which it was begun. To its credit, United Artists was sympathetic: Cimino is at least being given the chance to try to salvage something from the wreckage instead of having the picture taken away from him and cut by studio hands.

*Heaven's Gate* has become a media event but it is not unique. With the notable exception of *The Empire Strikes Back* (now the third most profitable film ever made), would-be blockbusters have recently been going down like skittles at the box-office. *Hurricane*, *The Island* and *1941* were all flops in America and *Raise the Titanic*, Lord Grade's bid for the big time, has never got out of the water.

According to Lord Grade, the original budget for *Raise the Titanic* was set at \$20m, but the production was delayed by nine months so that the film wound up costing as much as *Heaven's Gate*. Only after a 55-foot model of the Titanic had been built was it discovered that no tank in the world could accommodate it. So costs were inflated by the need to build a special tank in Malta to float it. To preserve perspective, all other models in the film had to be built to the same scale.

Similar tales of runaway costs are rife throughout the industry. John Schlesinger's *Honky-Tonk Freeway*, being made for the Thorn EMI group, started as a \$16m comedy; by the time it was finished, location photography in America had raised the budget by 50 per cent. Paramount's *Reds*, produced and directed by its star, Warren Beatty, began shooting in August 1979; a full year later it was still in production and not expected to be released before the autumn of 1981. The cost had already soared above \$30m. These films and many others like them will be lucky to wash their faces.

Since Hollywood now recognises that,

## THE MEGABUCK STAKES

	estimated N. American	
	cost	rentals
	\$m	\$m
<b>The way we were: 1967/70</b>		
DR DOLITTLE, Fox 1967	20	6.2
STAR, Fox 1968	15	4.2
DARLING LILI, Paramount 1970	22	3.3
TORA! TORA! TORA!, Fox 1970	25	14.5
<b>The way we are: 1977/80</b>		
SORCERER, Universal/Paramount 1977	22	5.9
THE WIZ, Universal 1978	24	13.6
HURRICANE, Paramount 1979	22	4.5
THE ISLAND, Universal 1980	22	9.6
<b>The way we're heading: 1981</b>		
INCHON, One Way	25	
HEAVEN'S GATE, United Artists	36	
REDS, Paramount	30	
RAGTIME, Filmways	25	

ten years after the last epidemic, it has been bitten by the squanderbug again, the search is on for culprits and scapegoats. First in the firing line are the directors who actually made the big-budget pictures that have lost so much money. The idea of the director as author and the value of film schools as training grounds for future film-makers are both under attack. Men like Steven Spielberg, William Friedkin and Cimino himself, all of whom had stray hits early in their careers and have since made some spectacularly unsuccessful movies, may find it hard to raise finance for future productions and still harder to get the right to a final cut.

After success, there is nothing Hollywood relishes more than a high-flyer missing the trapeze. It confirms the industry in its belief that it alone knows what the public wants. So the *Heaven's Gate* calamity is seen as the inevitable consequence of pampering the movie brats. Ergo, they should never again be given the whip hand. A depressing fall-out is that distinguished films like *The Conversation* and *New York, New York* may no longer be possible in the 1980s.

One step behind the film-makers, however, stand the studio heads who gave them a free hand. Their jobs are also on the line, and subtle management changes have already been put into effect in some of the companies most affected. In Associated Communications, Lord Grade has set up a new executive committee to try to make a dent in the group's awesome debt of more than £80m. This will involve the disposal of property assets and a temporary moratorium on all new film projects.

At United Artists, James Harvey, the

former chairman, has been transferred to the Transamerica parent as chief executive since 1 January. The new chief executive is Norbert Auerbach, brought in on the strength of an excellent record as the group's foreign manager since 1978. Thus there has, in effect, been considerable internal reorganisation. United Artists says it was all planned in December 1979 and has no connection with the fate of *Heaven's Gate*. Nevertheless, one of the top priorities on Auerbach's slate is the assignment of special production representatives to problem pictures in order to alert the board at an early stage when a film looks like overshooting its budget.

After *Heaven's Gate*, all the big production companies are taking a hard look at their budgets. MGM has set a \$15m ceiling on all future productions, with the aim of keeping the average cost down to \$10m. MGM's chairman, Frank Rosenfelt, recently told the annual stockholders' meeting that 'when we see things even starting to go out of control, we swoop down on it like a vulture on a dead body in the desert.' Walt Disney has cut planned spending on films from \$68.4m to \$55m for 1981; Universal intends to reduce its production costs by 25 per cent this year.

One director already affected by the new stringency is Francis Coppola. His *One from the Heart* was to have been a \$15m musical financed partly by MGM and partly by pre-selling foreign distribution rights. When the budget jumped to \$23m through Coppola's insistence on elaborate studio sets, foreign investors backed away. MGM declined to provide more money and Coppola had to mortgage personal property to keep shooting. Even so, cash ran out and at one point Coppola was strapped to pay the wage bill. Only a timely \$1m advance from Paramount saved him from having to abandon production then and there.

In the film industry, however, there is a two-year turnaround time before new policies can start to show through in profits. Throughout 1981, expensive films already completed or still in production will be causing grave economic problems for the majors. Michael Eisner, president of Paramount Pictures, thinks the business faces several years of belt-tightening and uncertainty. In the past five years, the number of companies involved in film-making in America has grown from six to more than thirty. Many of the newcomers, sucked in by the false lure of a 'fail-safe' investment, may succumb or be driven out in the crisis. But by 1984, Eisner thinks the shakeout will be over, leaving the survivors stronger than ever. Perhaps, but showbusiness memories are short. Hollywood would run true to form if, in the late 80s, it decided the public was ready for another round of extravaganzas.



# FROZEN ASSETS

## interviews on Polish cinema

Gustaw Moszcz

(translation assistance Daniel Gutowski)



Living in Poland now is to participate in momentous events which are, at the time of writing (January 1981), still in turmoil, although not quite the chaotic mess that the Soviet bloc media would have the West believe. The independent trade organisation (*union* is not an adequate term to describe a network of combined worker and intellectual groups which now conservatively account for ten million people) Solidarity exerts a discipline over its affiliated sub-sections which gives a coherent structure and aim to a nation which has progressively declined in moral hope and social cohesion since the first defeat of working class aspiration to democratic representation in 1956.

Since that year (the events of which are given as major reference points in Wajda's *Man of Marble*), there have been three further clashes with state power—in 1968, 1970 and 1976. The last date saw the formation of several dissident groups, notably KOR, which formed a new pattern of close links between intellectual opposition and working class frustration with severe economic depression. With the toppling of Gierek from power in late summer 1980 the way has been opened for cautious pressure to be exerted on the new régime.

The dilemma of the Soviet Union concerning the growth in strength and organisational intelligence of Solidarity, has been to calculate the cost of a military intervention versus toleration of a more profoundly democratic and widely supported opposition group than even the wildest liberal in Prague '68 could have

dreamt possible. Unlike any other post-war social development in Europe, the intellectual repression and material hardship in post-'56 Poland has thrown up that revolutionary rarity—an organisation in which the intelligentsia and the working class have concurrent aims and a unity of practice to achieve those aims. It is impossible to know how long this may last.

As David Robinson pointed out in the last issue of *SIGHT AND SOUND*, the function of Polish cinema in the last decade had come to be that of a public moralist, albeit frequently silenced and hindered. Part of the demands of Solidarity are the unearthing of figures, of known corruption. The much vaunted purge of the Polish CP has in fact been a fairly cosmetic device, with only Gierek, his central committee clique, and various senior functionaries around the regional administrative centres losing their posts. The previous head of Polish TV and radio, Szczepanski, has been found guilty of multi-million dollar corruption (amongst other things), and has been placed in an asylum as being unfit to plead, though he has asked for an open hearing. The feeling among Solidarity members is that Szczepanski is being silenced for fear that he will incriminate other senior and middle level party officials. In Zanussi's latest film there appears the character of the man 'who can arrange everything'—the whole of *Contract* stands as a bitter indictment of the degeneration of social mores in a nation which Zanussi describes as having a ruling élite made up of 'consumption oriented middle-class

people who have a lack of respect towards the people, which is a rightist attitude.'

Arguably, the strength of Polish cinema derives paradoxically from the moral debilitation and economic collapse that the country has suffered. Film-makers in Poland simply have a wealth of genuine complaints and extreme problems to focus on, both in actually trying to produce cinema and in their ordinary existence. The best of them have been engaged in a subtle guerrilla campaign to speak clearly and pointedly about their own society. It's impossible to imagine a Polish *Star Wars*, not simply because of the limitation of finances but precisely since there are more urgent human issues to give voice to. This doesn't mean there are no sterile Polish films being made, nor should we mistake the major talents of Wajda, Zanussi and Kieslowski for representations of an iceberg of submerged artistic creativity and moral acerbity—the largely unseen bulk of production unfortunately really is cold, heavy and uninteresting. A crucial article by Boleslaw Sulik in the Winter 1980 issue of *Survey* makes this only too clear:

'In past years one of the really damaging weaknesses of Polish cinema has been the amount of dead wood it was carrying. Over fifty per cent of practising directors have failed to prove their worth in either artistic or commercial terms. Out of eighty feature films completed in the period 1975-78, forty have failed in distribution to recover more than two-fifths of production costs, and sixteen have been seen by less than 100,000 people—an extraordinary statistic. And with one





'Man of Marble'.

or two exceptions the commercial failure of such films was not caused by artistic experimentation . . . dozens of demonstrably untalented people continue to plan films and occasionally make them, ostensibly because the socialist economy guarantees employment to all graduates from the State Film School in Lodz. The deeper, underlying reason is that there is no political danger in making dull, uninspiring films. At times of tension . . . any film that catches the mood of the time and communicates well with its Polish audience is politically disturbing to the ruling party. A recourse to pliant mediocrity becomes a more attractive option than ambitious attempts to comment truthfully on the social realities of the day.'

But despite the mass of dull literary adaptations and trivial costume dramas churned out from the various Film Units\*, there are several people in Polish production, not only the known figures of Wajda and Zanussi (though their lead is tremendously important, not least because they possess international reputations which encourage other cinema workers to take stands on issues), who are working towards a revitalisation of

the industry under the impetus of Solidarity's determination. There has been a real opening up within Polish film and TV in the last few months of 1980, with many previously banned films being shown on TV and new productions being started which could previously have been only fantasies. A film which uses material shot in the Gdansk Lenin shipyards, *Robotnicy '80* (*Workers '80*), has toured widely, and Solidarity is pursuing the demand for codification and relaxation of censorship, as agreed by the Government in the signed document which settled the summer 1980 strikes. An important aim of the Polish Film-Makers' Association is to take control of the distribution of finances for the industry. Whether either of these will actually be realised is still an open question—if successfully evolved they will have controversial consequences for the state's control not only of cinema but of cultural practice generally.

In an effort to obtain a first-hand view of developments in Polish cinema, I conducted a series of interviews with people involved in production of some of the important recent films. Three of these interviews are given here in an edited version. The first is with Krystyna Janda, the young actress who had leading roles in Wajda's *Conductor* and *Man of Marble* and is currently working on his sequel to the latter, *Man of Iron*. Interviewed with her in November 1980 was Edward Klosinski, director of photography on all Wajda's recent films except *Conductor*—a notable exception considering that film's rather inferior

technical achievement. The final interview is with Krzysztof Kieslowski, who at forty is probably Poland's leading documentarist, and as a feature director can be classed with both Wajda and Zanussi. Kieslowski is perhaps best known in Britain for *Camera Buff*, shown at the 1979 London festival. Kieslowski is a deputy chairman of the Polish Film-Makers' Association (Wajda is president) and also teaches at the new film school in Katowice, along with Zanussi.

The demoralisation of the cinema industry in Poland broke with the formation of Solidarity—all three interviewees are members, along with Wajda and Zanussi. The flurry of activity they are at present involved in is not only a sign of renewed vitality in the industry, but also stems from bitter memories of previous periods of liberalisation which eventually degenerated into the familiar patterns of enforced silence and censored films. Their willingness to talk now in such frank terms is born both of courage and the desire to seize the opportunity to speak while the present liberalisation lasts.

The experience of official disfavour extends across all levels of the Polish industry. Zanussi lost his teaching post at the Lodz State Film School in the 70s for having 'intolerable' ideas. He was told they were 'incompatible with the instrumental nature of film art.' At the main entrance to the Lodz school there is a large notice which declares 'Film is the most important of all the arts—Lenin', and this simplistic approach to the industry has dominated Polish cinema since the war. Its more remarkable products have emerged despite the state's close ties with cinema. Often this interference has taken the form of very trivial control. In interview, Zanussi commented that, 'Our ex-leader's wife often expressed her opinions concerning TV programmes and films, and this influenced the careers of some actors, whom she liked and disliked, because some . . . cowards tried to follow her choices. It happened. I don't blame her for having opinions, but the middle functionaries who were so eager to fulfil her desires.'

But there is no determination by Polish film-makers to return to free enterprise production. Their criticism is not of the system but its practical defects. As Zanussi says, in a remark which most in the industry would echo, 'I'm happy that culture and especially film is subsidised by the state, it should be, but I'm also happy that I don't depend on this subsidy alone, because if my films make money (which they do) that gives me more freedom. I don't want to feel gratitude.'

Polish cinema, which Zanussi described to me as 'the strongest bastion of social criticism in Poland in the last few years,' has laboured under the state's demand to present Utopian rhetoric about contemporary social life, nostalgic costume epics, and lugubrious reminders of Resistance heroism. Given the quantity of talent the industry currently possesses, the liberalisation could unleash a volume of new productions which will be fascinating and less allusive than has previously been the case. ►

\*The unit system seems an ideal approach to the relationship between state finance and cinema. Each unit operates as an autonomous team under an artistic manager, with voluntary membership. Each unit receives state financial support and has the right to choose scripts for production. Wajda heads one such unit. In practice of course this independence has been curtailed by 'higher' considerations—namely, the censor's office and difficulty in obtaining finance for sensitive subjects.



# Biting cinema, biting people

Krystyna Janda and Edward Klosinski

To what extent does working in film in Poland entail compromises?

EK: In film of course you are involved in compromises; it's the essence since cinema is the co-operation of many people. Compromise with the State however is a different matter—that involves very basic issues, like the choice of subject matter.

KJ: The very fact that censorship exists forces our choice, as if in expectation of possible intervention. We know how we would do things if there were no censor's office. It forces us to disguise our ideas, it preconditions our thinking. The problem now is to start thinking in different ways.

EK: Censorship the Polish way is tragic—quite absurd. It should be banned altogether. If we are to have any then moral censorship, and also making sure that religious feelings are not offended. In Polish and Russian art there has developed a method of passing round the obstacles of censorship by communicating via metaphors, allusions, ellipses and so on. Nothing has to be said straight. In some ways it stimulates literature. But it also makes our culture fairly inaccessible to foreign audiences. Some things are understood only inside Poland, or even only by a group within the nation. Some things of great value are sealed off from larger audiences.

KJ: I know for example that many of our films find their way to the other Eastern states, but those most important to us, such as *Man of Marble* or *Rough Treatment*, never reach there. We aren't informed what goes where. If I know that something has been shown in those countries it's only because I get letters from Czechoslovakia or East Germany asking for a photo or a meeting.

EK: Well, we do know that every Polish film is sent to Moscow, a copy, where it is seen by 'enlightened men' who decide whether it's suitable for distribution. People from other Eastern European countries charter trips to come here to see films that will never be shown in their countries—they ask us if we can arrange screenings. Even from Bulgaria they come. Bulgaria is a tragedy. We can often arrange screenings like that because we have access to projection rooms, and films not currently in distribution.

KJ: Of course films are made there too which we will never see in Poland. I got a list of eight films I should see when I was working in Hungary, and managed to see half. Nor do we have any control over what is seen and when. I often do TV work, dramas that cost a fortune and aren't ever shown, and then once five plays which I did over two years were shown in the course of a week's TV. No

influence over distribution, no royalties for TV repeats—I'm a hired woman.

What about the level of film or TV criticism—do you rate it highly?

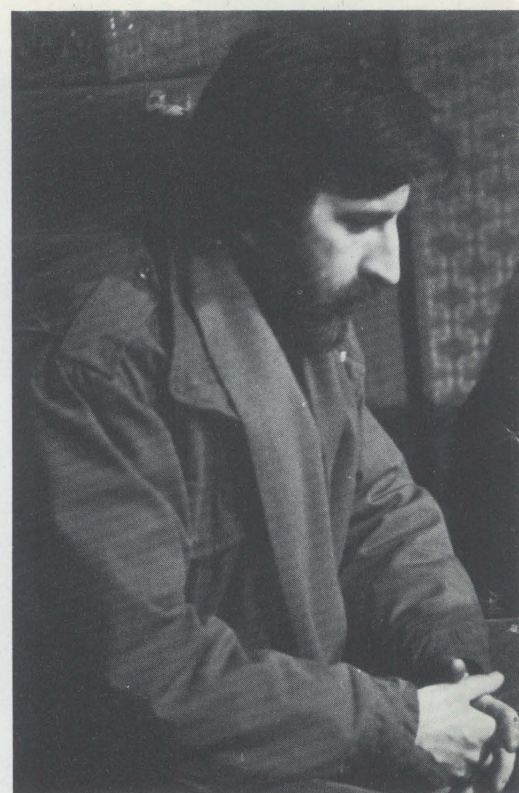
KJ: There isn't good professional criticism in Poland. Usually criticism is limited to the history of a given play, how staging of it has developed, who performed, whether the actors were nice or not, fast or slow, etc... And then you get malicious reviews which pass personal judgments without proof—those I don't bother with. But I listen to the private opinions of colleagues, and that has replaced professional criticism. The best proof of the inadequacy of professional criticism here was with *Man of Marble*. It was attacked for its thought, technique, everything, and then it had great responses from audiences both here and in the West. There is nothing to talk about. Criticism is steered like everything else. What critics once condemned, as with *Man of Marble*, or Milosz's poetry, they now sing hymns of praise to.

EK: Culture in Poland is 'centralised', there are few independent thinking critics. Artistic circles here are relatively small and the intelligentsia is in a defensive position. An independent critic might launch a critique of a film made with good intentions but artistically weak. He will not though because he will hear voices—'You see, even this independent doesn't like it.' So we have official critics who are not concerned with artistic values and criticise works on crude political terms, and a small collection of independent critics who cannot afford to criticise severely anything which presents really undoctinaire political or social thought.

KJ: If the authorities decide a film is dangerous, the reviews are also slanted to fit in with this view. These are the hired people, for this purpose.

EK: When Milosz was given the Nobel Prize for literature in 1980, many people learned for the first time that we have a great poet. Previously his very name was proscribed. The censorship is absurd. Our best theatre director, Tadeusz Kantor, produced a play called *Dead Class*, and obtained permission to tour it round Poland. With Kantor's permission Wajda made a film of a performance, which the censor then prevented from screening on TV, because then everyone could see it. It's very difficult to see that film.

KJ: Even if an official critic loses 'common sense' and writes a positive criticism it won't be published, since the state has had until recently a monopoly of the printed word. Luckily we have an underground press. Which, again, hasn't got



Above: cameraman Edward Klosinski (left) with Andrzej Wajda.

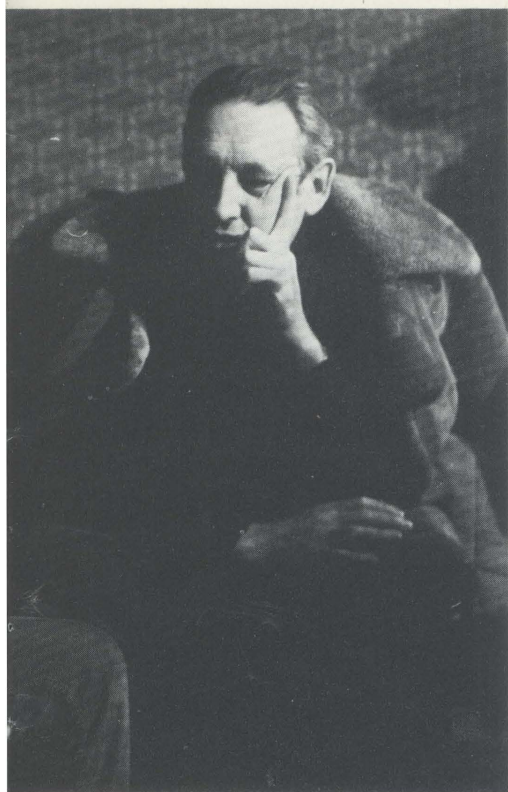


exactly clean hands since it cannot criticise what has been officially condemned.

Can you give a particular instance of the interference of the censor's office?

EK: Many. When Wajda was shooting *The Wedding* (1972), we invented a scene in which a peasant was lost in the mist at a place near Krakow where the borders of the Russian, German and Austrian empires once met. There he is spotted by three border patrols, and a Cossack from the Russian side shoots at him. Wajda was summoned for a meeting with comrade Szydlak in the Central Committee. Szydlak was then the number two man in Poland, and he instructed Wajda to make some other soldier shoot, an Aus-





Below: Krystyna Janda as the violinist in Wajda's 'Conductor'.



trian maybe but not the Cossack. He changed the scene accordingly. Then, when we worked together on *The Land of Promise* (1974), I suggested that we incorporate a historically accurate event in which the Cossacks charged on the striking workers. Wajda answered that he was not going to have anything to do with Cossacks again and that comrade Szydlak had explained very clearly to him why this was so. Nevertheless we shot the scene, but it was cut from the film by the censor. The paradox, which you may not grasp since you're not so well-trained in roundabout thinking as I am, is that in *The Land of Promise* those were the workers, it was the proletariat's case, but our Polish party official

defends the Cossacks on the grounds that they are Russian. He forgets the historical truth about the oppression of the very proletariat he is claiming to represent.

**How was it possible that *Man of Marble* could have been accepted for production, given that very tightly worked out scripts are required before any finance is given by the state?\***

EK: This was purely chance. The film script waited for twelve years before we could start production. The Minister of Culture then (when the film was given permission to be made, 76-77) was Mr Tejchma, who agreed to the starting of production, personally. He's Minister of Culture again now, but then he was in the process of slipping down the ladder of power, step by step. He knew he was already done, but was still Minister of Culture. So he decided to make a gesture and agreed to the production of *Man of Marble*. At that time it could not harm him any more, but as since proved, could help him in the long run. He played a game and played it well. And now he has made another gesture, as if in gratitude to Wajda, and has agreed to the production of the screenplay for *Man of Iron*.

*Man of Marble* was originally intended as a reaction to the crushing of the workers' action in '56, but as the film was delayed became relevant to that of '70, in Gdansk. Shooting took 2½ months, and the film cost about 17 million zloties,† which is really very little. The main cost was the erection of the construction site of the 1950s. Actors cost next to nothing in Poland. We calculated that the real cost of the film, if we had made it privately, would have been half that figure. Why? Production of props is not considered as production of ordinary goods. A chair costs, say, 2,500 zloties when made in the studio but it would cost only 500 maybe from an ordinary carpenter. The studio carpenter is in the business of producing 'artistic' goods.

**Wajda is currently preparing a sequel to be called *Man of Iron*. Could you tell us something of this project?**

EK: The film will be shot this winter, starting in early January. We want to finish it in two months, before the next Party Congress, just in case something changes for the worse again. Formally it's based on similar lines to *Man of Marble*. There is a guide figure in the new film, only this time not Krystyna but an older male journalist. He is assigned a task by the security police, that of gathering incriminating material against one of the 1980 strike leaders.

The man the police want to destroy is the character of young Birkut, who is

\*'Demands for close political supervision of the content shape production procedures and directly influence creative processes. ... At a time when many Western film-makers prefer to work with broad story outlines ... production in Poland remains script-bound. Only directors who feel politically in a strong position would risk taking liberties with the approved screenplay.' B. Sulik, *Survey*.

†Official exchange rates are approx. 30 zloties = 1 us dollar, but the black market rate, a better guide to purchasing power reality, hovers at 120 = 1 dollar.

involved in the latter part of *Man of Marble*, played by the same actor, Jerzy Radziwillowicz. This character represents in the new film the most radical wing of the actual Solidarity movement, a compilation of two leaders who are more aggressive than Walesa (who will appear in the film as himself, giving speeches, etc). The authorities believe (in the film) that if they can blacken the character of Birkut, then Walesa will soften considerably. Since this is to be a continuation of *Man of Marble*, we will be using the final scene of that earlier film, which was cut by the censor, which shows Birkut at the grave of his father, shot by the Milicja in 1970 in Gdansk. This scene does several things—links the two films, explains the radical standpoint of young Birkut, and marks the change of the general situation since *Man of Marble* was released.

The main character, the journalist, is a journalist not by accident in the film since this is one of the most disgraced professions in our country. This man is cynical, connected with the authorities because he has no other choice, and knows that any real changes are going to threaten his pleasant niche. Being an elderly man he just wants to live his life securely to the end.

In the course of his search for dirty material against Birkut he finds that there is no way of 'biting' this man. The journalist begins to realise that there may be some true values in life since so many people seem to share the same opinion, the same goal—the same movement. He is then revealed as a police agent and is disgraced, but he has a chance to revive morally; he discovers that there are other things in life than money and useful connections.

We are trying to gather as much actual footage as possible from the events in the shipyards during summer 1980, to create the impression that our characters participate in them. The rest will be shot in the studio—a technical problem being that of trying to film summer events during winter months. There are also going to be retrospective sequences from 1970, with flashbacks from '68 and '76. A trip to Bulgaria with such a film cannot even be contemplated!

KJ: But such a film can go to the West ... if it brings enough money. In this economic crisis, if it earns enough to buy a week's supply of butter that's enough to make it a valuable film. Besides my role in the new film I also have a part in a film being made by Piotr Szulkin, a talented young director, *War of the Worlds*. This takes Wells' novel as a basis for a sort of allegory in which Martians arrive on earth as friends. We all know who the friendly Martians are ... Besides this I'm busy in the theatre.

EK: The theatre remains the actors' chief source of income. There's no class of separate film actors in Poland, our yearly output of films is too small, some 35 films a year.

KJ: I prefer working in film. Acting in the theatre is interesting to me only during rehearsals and the first ten nights of a performance. And TV too, which in Poland does not on the whole have well-qualified staff. When I'm working on a TV show where I sing, I have to find



composer, lyricist or lyrics, take care of the lights, make-up, scenery and props, and make the tea too. Working in film is different, and with Wajda it's wonderful. He has never used the same actress twice until me, so I feel very happy that he seems so pleased with my abilities. During shooting he requires the actors to suggest several alternative versions of the same scene—he really uses us well, though he of course is responsible for the final film. In comparison with Polish, foreign actors are so expensive—for *Conductor* Wajda originally had the idea of using Laurence Olivier, but he was too expensive, and Gielgud took the part for £25,000.

**Cultural workers in Socialist countries occasionally receive state honours, medals, etc. Do you value these?**

EK: No, but it's an amusing question because it happens I have one such medal.

KJ: It can be useful because you become entitled to medical treatment at a government clinic—the best there is in Poland. You know what hospitals are like here—no equipment, medicine, over-worked staff, over-crowded wards, dirt. Almost everywhere. And if you have a heart attack this state award may save your life.

Wajda told me a funny story. Five years ago he received the Order of the Banner of Work, Second Class. [Ironically enough for *The Land of Promise*—GM.] He said to me, 'Do you know why they gave me this? Just look at who else got them. Two unknown but obedient directors. When I get this junk I don't grow or shrink in other people's opinions, but they are promoted by the very fact they got it on the same occasion that I did.' Everything in this system of preferences is very carefully thought over.

**What date seems most crucial in Polish post-war history to you, and what are your views about the possible outcome of the present crisis?**

KJ: 1980...

EK: I think it's Yalta—this shaped Europe and sealed our history. As for present events, the threat is the same as with Prague '68 but everything else is different. There it started from the tip of the social pyramid, here from the widest, lowest base point. The Russians intervened there as soon as the top of the pyramid crumbled. Our great friends are aware that intervention here would end with much more tragedy than even Hungary in '56. It would be opposed much more actively and without exaggerating I think there would be millions of casualties. In 1956 when the Polish workers also made moves against the system the conflict was solved very cleverly by Krushchev and Gomulka. The Soviets made a military move which was blocked by the Polish army, a silent coup happened in Warsaw with Soviet backing, Gomulka took over declaring that we would fight to the last, and won popular support. The Russians withdrew leaving the new man to turn the screws down more tightly than before, as Gomulka did, in the 50s. We suspect a repeat performance now. □

# No heroics, please

## Krzysztof Kieslowski

**What are you working on at the moment?**

KK: I'm finishing a script for a new film, called *Chance*. Three different fates of the same man are presented, three possible lives for the same person. In one he is a party activist, in another an opposition activist, and in the third he is just a man fulfilling his ordinary human obligations, as a doctor. Each course depends on a chance, in the contingent sense that our lives now may be changed completely by whether we turn right or left when we leave this hotel today.

The film argues that a person is as if destined to behave in a certain way regardless of circumstances—it's a dispute between freedom and necessity. The character in the film finds three different fates but essentially remains the same. If it were a film about a corrupt bastard he would be that throughout the three lives, and if about an honest man (as he in fact will be) then he will remain honest in all three incarnations, in spite of the fact that he is nominally on different sides of the barricade.

**Is there a constant thread running through your films?**

KK: My films are always observations of a man in a situation which forces him to make a choice to define his standpoint. It is always an attempt at considering which is right, objective reality or the character who works against that reality. I'm convinced that as individuals—and I'm concerned with individuals in my films—we always find ourselves opposed to reality. In my films I present two models of life. The private inner one, self-realisation, and objectively existing reality, social conditions and relations. These use different languages which cannot be reconciled and a conflict is therefore inevitable.

**Does this bring you into conflict with the 'objective reality' presented in the programme of the Polish state?**

KK: It's a natural consequence of my views. I do not participate in anything which doesn't agree with my outlook on the world. This is not the case though with many writers, journalists and directors in Poland and elsewhere in the Eastern bloc.

An immediate effect of this is that none of my documentaries has ever been sold abroad and some are stopped from being screened in Poland. This is no heroism on my part, because the most essential thing for me is to register a given event or situation. Of course it's pleasant to see crowded cinemas, to show films at festivals and be given awards, but this is additional, not essential.

I automatically place myself in the position of making films which are stored and not shown for years, sometimes never. The scripts are usually accepted, I was never actually denied the right to

make any of my films. Perhaps I'm clever at writing screenplays which pass a qualifying committee, but with finished products the case is different.

It may seem strange that I have received so many festival prizes, but the point is that, having been shown and praised at festivals abroad, the films are then withdrawn from distribution, over which of course I have no control. This is analogous to the situation of many writers who, as we say, 'wrote for the desk drawer', who created work which they knew in advance could not be made generally available. But with me there is a slight difference—film costs an awful lot of money. I often have doubts about making yet another film which will be just a frozen investment.

How many films have been stopped in this fashion? Quite a number at different periods. But distribution, as I said, is not an essential measure of success for me. I would like them to be exploited but it's no tragedy if they are not. Not that I don't believe that some of them are very important social documents at given moments. One such, *Spokoj (Peace)*, was made four years ago but shown on TV only in October of '80.\* Even though it was delayed, and lost some of its critical edge in the process, I still think the most important thing was done, which was to register on film the story of a man who had a minimum programme for his life, and was not allowed to realise even this small aim because he was entangled in dirty business against his own will.

**Do you manage to have much contact with cinema outside the Soviet bloc?**

KK: I did a lot of travelling but it didn't give me much in the professional line. I have many superficial contacts abroad, but social rather than professional. When I'm abroad I'm interested in the same things as in Poland—finding out human desires, views, ideas, discovering everyday situations. I rarely see the films when I go to festivals—in all my journeys I saw perhaps three I really wanted to. Particularly Tarkovsky's *Mirror*. I myself value most those films which join fictional with documentary elements. I have, as it were, participated in the development of a new sub-genre in Polish film, which draws from the documentary approach and techniques.

**What would be your conception of the**

\**Spokoj* tells the story of a released convict who arrives at a small town where he settles down with a wife, who is to bear him a child. He has not been a political prisoner. He works on a construction site, and his objective is to settle down, leading a peaceful decent life, and forget about jail. But half a load of bricks disappear from the site and the foreman, in order to avoid an official investigation (there is a thriving black market in building materials in Poland), forces the site workers to give up part of their wages. From this he illegally buys bricks from another site. He forces the ex-con to collect the bricks at night,





Features by Kieslowski. Above: 'Amator' ('Camera Buff', 1979), about an amateur film-maker. Below: 'Blizna' ('The Scar', 1976).



#### ideal relationship between state and film industry in Poland?

KK: What we are postulating is that the industry should have the opportunity of recording whatever phenomena it wants without hindrance from the state. We want the power of decision, under the assumption that we are more representative of this nation than the authorities. This is the aim of all artistic groups in Poland, control over finance, distribution, a codification of the censorship. It's an obvious goal. Naturally I'm a member of Solidarity, as are the majority of working people.

But I'd like to warn you against the exaggeration of censorship as a problem. It isn't the worst thing of our system. Far worse is the state's arbitrary limitation of human thinking to certain chosen subjects. Censorship applied the directives

threatening that if he refuses he will be the first suspect in an official investigation. The other workers go on spontaneous strike against the wage cut. The ex-con foolishly tries to reconcile the foreman and other workers, but attends a meeting of local construction site foremen who decide to sack the 'skunks' (the strikers) and teach them a lesson. At this the ex-con violently reacts and rushes out of the meeting. On his way home he is ambushed by the other workers who savagely beat him up. The film ends with him crawling home, sobbing and whining, crying out the words 'Peace, peace'. G.M.

resulting from that policy. We need to beware of slipping into that situation again under the new authorities.

The real harm was not what censorship prevented but all those things which were not even thought of as possible because people were discouraged from creative thinking and practice. There was a whole system of silence in communication, from the Ministry of Culture right down to the humblest local village authorities.

**As a documentarist, many of your films deal with the total demoralisation of social life in Poland, which only recently has become possible to discuss publicly. How do you explain this degeneration?**

KK: The theory of our system is very good but unfortunately it happened that in practice it has been very different, has actually never been put into practice. Demoralisation is not limited only to the authorities; it originated there but has spread in widening circles.

The corruption spread through the way in which the theory was realised. In many instances people have lost the ability of clearly distinguishing right and wrong, and the tragedy of this country is that what is wrong has become good, or at least unimportant, unworthy of notice. In the film industry I could point to many people who have taken an easier route

just because it makes it more comfortable to live and work. It doesn't necessarily bring great material benefits. In film one is particularly exposed to pressure from the authorities because they consider film an important instrument of propaganda.

What was considered convenient for those who held power was regarded as good for the nation and the state. Which obviously is not always true. It was not so much that money dominated, or censorship ruled, or that people were flung into jail unjustly—human dignity was ignored. In acting against the interest of the people the régime acted against its own interests. But they have never understood this simple truth and don't seem to now. It seems they never will, not until we live to see democratically elected governments. Theoretically our system should give us more artistic freedom than in Britain. In practice... well, it looks different.

This lack of respect explains the strength of the new movement, which is national, not merely based in the working class. Wajda put it very well when he said that people could not agree to being called *robot*†. The agitation in Poland now is not for luxury consumer goods. One of my recent films, *Talking Heads*, is a short in which I ask two questions of people aged from about two to a hundred—'Who are you?' and 'What do you want?' The answer to the second question is not a new car, more money, a washing machine, or whatever, but generally *freedom* and *justice*. And this explains, partly, the popularity, which is immense, of any new film from the West. In such films we often get two treats in one parcel—a representation of a mode of life we have not achieved, materially, but also the sight of the film-makers making critical judgments about that mode of life, unabridged, which chance we haven't achieved either.

**What is your view of Solidarity's chance of surviving as a real centre of broad alternatives to the current régime?**

KK: Having an independent union is probably the best result that could have been hoped for. I do not see any danger of its becoming bureaucratic with time. The danger lies *outside* the organisation—it may be crushed or outmanoeuvred or split. I am afraid that if the authorities act wisely and cautiously they may gradually eliminate Solidarity. Certainly the events which brought Solidarity into being are crucial, but I cannot say whether the final result of a game is more important than the game itself, especially if the predicted loser turns out to be the winner. If the result is bad it means a war. If good then the changes will be incomparably further reaching than in Prague '68. This cannot dissolve into nothing. ■

*This article could not have been accomplished without the generous co-operation of Janda, Klosinski and Kieslowski, nor without the considerable labours of my friend and colleague, Daniel Gutowski.—G.M.*

†A contemptuous term for a worker, abbreviating *robotnik*, which means worker. A *robak* is a large ugly worm. *Robal* emphasises its filthiness, and colloquially a worker recently has come to be called *robol*.



# NICHOLAS RAY: THE LAST MOVIES

Nicholas Ray, whose last 'Hollywood' film, *55 Days at Peking*, was made in 1962, died of cancer, aged 67, in New York City in June 1979. The full story of his last seventeen years and particularly the turmoil surrounding his final film projects has yet to be told. We print below two interim, frontline reports. Tom Farrell, one of Ray's former students and a subsequent collaborator, writes about the circumstances of *We Can't Go Home Again*, Ray's 'unfinished' work-in-progress, and *Lightning Over Water* (first subtitled *Nick's Film*), Wim Wenders' controversial homage to and collaboration with the dying Ray. Jon Jost, the independent American film-maker involved in the pre-production of the latter film, offers a contrary viewpoint. Richard Combs reviews the British release version of *Lightning Over Water* (reworked by Wenders after a hostile reception at Cannes) which is due to open in London shortly.

## WE CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN

### Tom Farrell

What happened to Nicholas Ray after *They Live By Night*, *In a Lonely Place*, *Johnny Guitar*, *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Bigger Than Life*? In September 1971, he began to collaborate on a film project with his students at Harpur College, New York State. Ray took a working print of the film—his obsession—to the 1973 Cannes Festival, where it was screened under the fitting title *We Can't Go Home Again*.

Following the pain and failure of *King of Kings* and *55 Days at Peking*, the Sam Bronston epics he shot in Spain, Ray vowed never again to make a film he despised. He also feared he would never get another chance. Rumours of illness persisted. Nick went into exile on the Isle of Sylt in the North Sea. For several years he collected paintings and experimented with multiple images. He was unable to get a film project off the ground.

Ray returned to America in 1969 to film the Chicago Conspiracy Trial. Since cameras were not permitted in the courtroom, he filmed the defendants and their attorneys after court sessions in a nearby studio using the actual trial transcripts. The conspirators played themselves; Nick considered Groucho Marx for the role of Judge Hoffman. While battling with the financial difficulties of telling this political story without compromise,

Nick suffered an embolism which cost him the sight of his right eye. 'The trial was a circus of bigotry,' he recalled years later. The abortive film project marked another bitter defeat.

In May 1971, Ray gave a lecture at Harpur College at Binghamton. His shock of white hair was offset by a black eyepatch, black Levis, black turtleneck and black cowboy boots. He arrived on campus immediately after the May Day demonstrations in Washington, D.C., where some 7,000 students from across the country had been arrested for civil disobedience. Although invited to speak about his films, Nick staged a 'scene' with the students, using all the cameras, tape-recorders and lights of the Cinema Department. He called on anyone recently returned from Washington to describe what had happened. I volunteered how, on my twenty-first birthday, I had been clubbed and Maced. Nick noted that sharing this experience was a lesson in acting.

We stayed up all night talking. The success of the lecture resulted in the offer, and ready acceptance, of a two-year contract as a visiting professor of cinema. Ray did not believe that film-making could be taught as an academic course. It had to be experienced. He combined his three classes into a production crew of forty-five students, who would train to be actors, writers, camera operators, sound recordists, editors, script clerks, gaffers, grips and assistant directors. Everyone had to be involved, and every two weeks the crew members would rotate roles. Camus' *Myth of Sisyphus* and Bergson's *Essay on Laughter* were required reading. It is difficult to distinguish the film from the conditions in which it was made. Nick expected a total commitment from everyone. Filming without a script, the crew worked mostly through the nights since students had other classes during the day. Jokingly, we called ourselves 'creatures of the night'.

The film was financed from Ray's own salary and from a State arts grant. He wrote a preliminary script called *The*

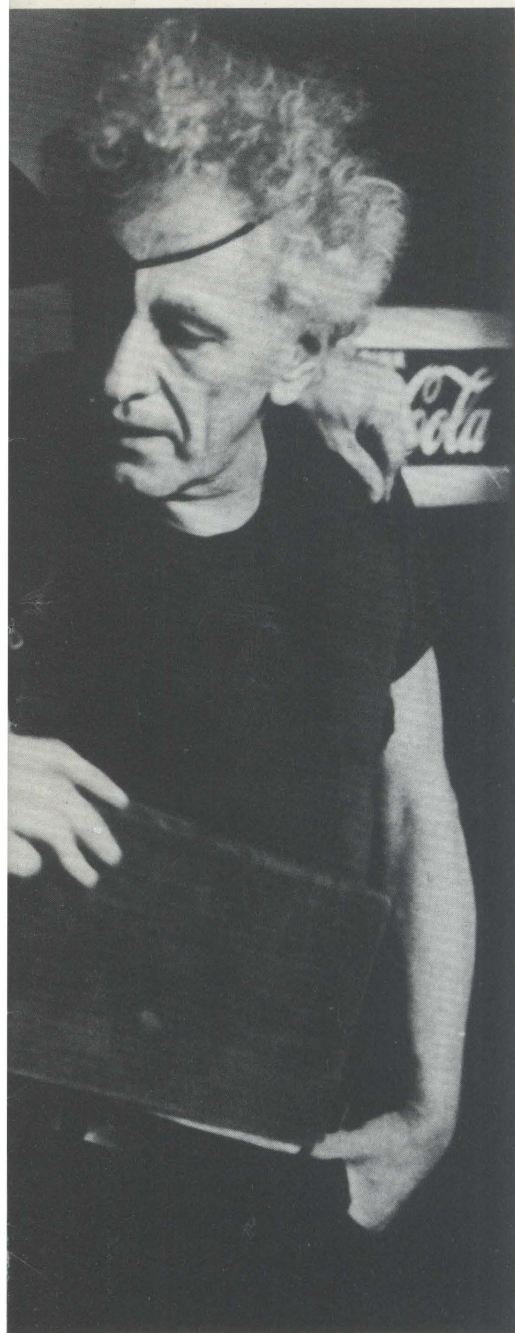


Hopper (left) and Ray at Harpur, September

*Gun Under My Pillow*, with the following preface: 'It is intended that this film be a happening. The purpose in making the film is to give the students a wide variety of experience in the mechanics, techniques and art of film-making. It is also intended to tell an intensely personal story of a man harassed by one or more premonitions, and equally determined to overcome the negativism, even at the cost of his life, which is, of course, what the premonition is all about.'

The first scene took place at night outside the college infirmary. Two men in white uniforms pound on the door. Nick, surprised, opens it from inside. He sees panic in their faces as they announce that someone has been hit by a car. He tells them to bang on the other door. They do. A nurse answers. They repeat the announcement. Perturbed, she tells them that the accident has been reported. She slams the door in their faces. The men run away when a hearse speeds into the driveway. Nick peeps in the window of the vehicle and then walks





1971. Photograph: Charles Levi.

back to the infirmary, shutting the door behind him.

Dennis Hopper was invited by Nick to Harpur to show his new film *The Last Movie*, but because of disastrous reviews in New York the releasing company cancelled the screening. Hopper told a wild audience that Nick Ray had given him his first significant part, in *Rebel Without a Cause*, and announced that his mentor was *persona non grata* in today's Hollywood: 'He can't even get a job directing a film.' Ray bristled, asserting his refusal to make deals instead of films. Then a student yelled, 'Do something from *Easy Rider*,' to which Hopper replied, 'My image is a fake, right?' He pointed to his cowboy hat and rugged road clothes.

Inspired by this visit, Nick set up a scene with the students brutally interrogating him. 'What are you doing here?' 'Aren't you too old to teach us cinema?' Nick improvised with the group through provocation: 'You are all guilty of conspiracy' and 'Who will be my Judas?' His

interaction with the students became a mutual need for companionship. He was more than a teacher; he was a father confessor. We were more than students; we were his children. Recognising this, Nick changed the title of our work in progress to *We Can't Go Home Again*. The phrase summed up our loss of direction. Thomas Wolfe was right. Home had ceased to exist except in the mothballs of memory. Nick was remaking *Rebel Without a Cause* for the post-war generation that woke up in 1968. The latent rebellion of the 50s climaxed in the late 60s. When the Beatles broke up we felt the world was coming to an end. Nick thought this would be his last film, and he wanted to tell everything he had learned. Some students paid attention to him, but many more dropped out of sight. A few grew to love him.

*We Can't Go Home Again* had no plot, just a central character named Nick, as fascinating as he was paranoid. He was a stranger who seemed to identify with young people, and I could not restrain the impression that Nick was grappling with a delayed rebellion of his own. Gradually, the film focused on the search for self image. Who am I? What am I? Why am I? The film was about the withdrawal from conflict in the streets to face the conflict within ourselves, and Nick's self-portrait in it is rooted in the gifted, neurotic characters from the films he had directed earlier: Bogart playing in *In a Lonely Place*, James Mason in *Bigger Than Life*, Richard Burton in *Bitter Victory*, Robert Ryan in *On Dangerous Ground*. He is the catalyst surrounded by impressionable students, who seek a sense of direction which he is unable to give. 'Every man is a father to every child,' says a character in *55 Days at Peking*, Ray's last 'Hollywood' film, in which he also appears briefly as an American ambassador confined to a wheelchair. Nick is the most tormented character in all his films, a man 'with a crucifixion in his face', as Melville described Ahab. He assumed the guilt of his generation, deeming it 'more guilty of betrayal than any in history.'

During Nick's two years at Harpur, the college was shaken by hysteria: Vietnam War protests, a memorial birthday party for Adolf Hitler, the Attica Prison riot, an orgy the night Nixon was re-elected, drug raids, police harassment, suicides. One night, after drinking in a bar, Nick drove home on back roads in darkness as though he was James Dean and crashed into a ditch. Miraculously, he was not injured. Another time, a student on LSD challenged him to a fist fight, which had to be stopped. After working all night, Nick often fell asleep over breakfast, face down in a plate of pancakes and eggs. At one time he was so strung out for money that he thought of shooting a porno film on the side.

Finally, Nick received an invitation to show our two years of work at the 1973 Cannes Festival. A crew of six travelled to Hollywood, the home of Nick's greatest achievements, to complete the editing and sound mixing. We put the whole film together out of chaos in the same bungalow at the Chateau Marmont where Nick

had stayed while making *Rebel Without a Cause*. Shot in 16mm, 35mm and Super-8, processed through a video colour synthesiser and transferred back to film, *We Can't Go Home Again* is a mosaic of multiple images. One image (usually on the lower left side of the screen), contained the central action of the scene, while the other three, four or sometimes five images provided supplementary impressions. We achieved this effect by running several projectors simultaneously, so that the images would appear on a large screen. They were then filmed as a composite 35mm picture.

In Hollywood, we were burnt out from exhaustion. During a tense moment when he feared failure, Nick almost withdrew the film from the festival. 'I love living dearly, but I'm involved in dying,' he cried. Eventually, he flew to Cannes with a new print in hand.

*We Can't Go Home Again* begins in 1968 at the bloody Chicago Democratic Convention. Nick narrates the ensuing trial, as the defendants, the Chicago Seven, meet on the screen. The film's title appears one word at a time over a frantic night drive down a highway: on the soundtrack Norman and Suzy Zamcheck sing a blues number—'Bless the family that loves together... Bless the family that lives and dies together/ Bless the family that loves/Bring them some happiness/Shelter from loneliness.'

In one scene, Nick is antagonised by a student named Richie Bock. When asked why he was kicked out of his last college, Richie says he was involved with the Students for a Democratic Society. 'Are you getting out of the fight again?' Nick asks. 'I'm in one right now,' Richie replies. 'With yourself?' 'No, with you.' In another scene, Nick questioned a red-haired student named Danny Fisher: 'What made you think of growing a beard?' The answer, Charlton Heston as Moses.

Our leading lady complained to Nick of cramps, telling him how she deliberately contracted syphilis to obtain a prescription for penicillin. Nick directed a scene of her confession, with himself as her betrayer. When she cries for help, he feigns warmth, graciously escorting her to his director's chair on a red carpet. She reveals a quest for corruption in New York's East Village. Nick listens deceitfully to her whine: 'I could always be a flower, but I'm not. I'm always ugly.' At that devastating moment, Nick commands the students to throw tomatoes in her face. A massacre. She rushes forward close up to the camera screaming. Nick orchestrates the attack wearing two eyepatches.

Like all the characters in the film, she longed for affection. Another girl walks alone in the rain searching for someone. She visits a boy who is sleeping with his girl friend. Rejected, she confides to the camera: 'I don't want to go back home to my parents. They still think I'm a virgin. They want me to be a virgin. All over again.' I was an actor in the film. In one scene Nick tells me a Riddle of the Sphinx about a wise man (himself) who travels the world in search of a guiding truth. Eventually, he puts the question to the Sphinx. Whereupon, according to



Nick, 'For the first time in 5,000 years the Sphinx opened her mouth and said: Don't expect too much.'

I appeared in a scene shot at the 1972 Democratic Convention in Miami. Disillusioned by America, I returned to Harpur resolved to shave off a year's untrimmed beard. Nick filmed the removal of my mask. I shook my fist at the stranger in the mirror. While the camera was rolling, Nick begged me to open up. 'Talk to me, Tom. Make me believe in you.' I looked at myself in the mirror and said: 'My name is Tom Farrell. I was born on 3 May 1950, in New York City. I studied to be a priest for five and a half years. My father is a homicide detective with the New York City police force. I love him. Don't call him a pig. He's a person who talked a lot of people out of committing suicide.'

In the film, the Nick character suffers two symbolic deaths. First, he is killed by a motorist while hitch-hiking dressed in a Santa Claus costume. The body of Saint Nick is wheeled away in a red wagon. Then, at the climax, I argue bitterly with Nick while running from a house to shelter in a barn. Nick climbs a ladder in the barn, fearing I will hang myself with the noose he has left there to use himself. While I hide, Richie accuses Nick of tempting me with the deliberately planted noose. The men swing and kick at each other from ropes hanging from the rafters. Trying to remove a rope, Nick accidentally hangs himself. As the body swings furiously back and forth, the voice of the professor leaves his students a legacy: 'Take care of each other. It's your only chance to survive. And let the rest of us swing.' Nick hangs at the end of his tether choking. 'I was interrupted.' That's how the film ended at Cannes.

In 1976, Nicholas Ray became friends with Wim Wenders, who gave him a role opposite Dennis Hopper in *The American Friend*. Nick succeeded in pulling himself together by joining Alcoholics Anonymous. He lived in a SoHo loft with Susan Schwartz, his devoted companion of many years. Milos Forman offered him the part of the irascible general in the movie of *Hair*. While teaching at the Lee Strasberg Theater Institute, Nick was stricken with cancer. He underwent surgery three times at the Memorial Sloan Kettering Center.

In 1979, Nick agreed to make a film with Wim Wenders about their friendship. Out of the blue a crew of Germans, Frenchmen and Americans were assembled to film a lecture Nick was to deliver at Vassar College in upstate New York. Wenders' Berlin company, Road Movies, financed the project, which was produced by Chris Sievernich and Pierre Cottrell. Ed Lachman operated camera. We started shooting on the road, as Nick was being chauffeured to the lecture in a limousine. At Vassar, Nick was introduced to the audience after a screening of *The Lusty Men*, whose theme, in 1952, he described as the American Dream of finding a home of one's own. When a young woman asked if he had any regrets about his career, Nick replied, 'Yes, I drank too much.' He looked frail but

serene, happy to have the camera on his face.

Back at the SoHo loft, the crew watched the same work print of *We Can't Go Home Again* that was shown at Cannes six years before. The film was screaming with technical problems, but the composite portrait of electronic colours and clashing images captivated us. The shock was seeing how Nick's health had deteriorated since the Harpur film.

Seeking to help Nick finish *We Can't Go Home Again*, Wim plays 'a German Friend'. He describes the script he has written for *Hammett*. 'What's your budget?' Nick asks. 'Ten million dollars.' Nick: 'For one per cent of that I could make... lightning over water.'

Despite severe pain in the abdomen and back, Nick summoned the strength to act. Losing his battle with cancer, he asked his son Tim, a cameraman, to fly in from Los Angeles to film his father for the movie. Nicholas Ray made his last public appearance at the Museum of



Ray directing 'We Can't Go Home Again', 1971. Photograph: Charles Levi.

Modern Art between screenings of *They Live By Night* and *On Dangerous Ground*. We lifted him on stage in a wheelchair. Six weeks later he died. Wim filmed Nick's dream of sailing in a Chinese junk that would take him to the Orient in search of a ginseng cure for cancer. A Mitchell camera was mounted on deck, panning round and round by itself. A Moviola was fastened on deck with reels of celluloid strip flapping in the wind. Nick's ghost sailed out to sea.

Nick once told me that he wanted to invent a black light. I asked him: 'Nick, why the hell would you want to invent a black light?' He said: 'So I can shoot night scenes in the daytime.' Nick Ray was an angry old man with many contradictions. He hated the forces of repression with a passion, but he also possessed the seeds of his own destruction. He took a blind run and saw a black light. □

## WRONG MOVE

### Jon Jost

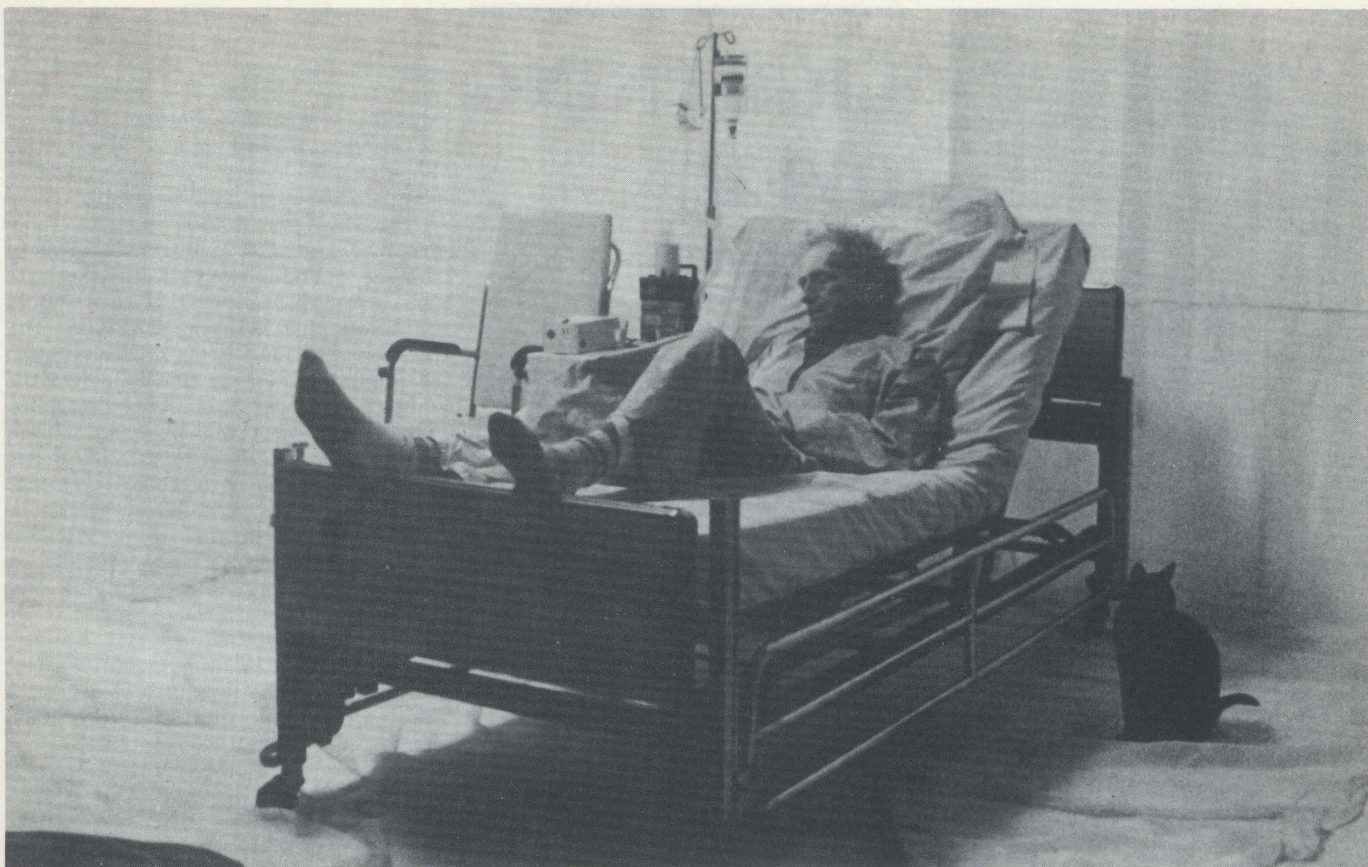
The following words are not—and cannot be—distanced or dispassionate. I met Nick Ray in mid-December 1978, through a friend, the actor Bob Glaudini. Arriving penniless in New York after some months in Europe, we stayed briefly in Nick's SoHo loft. Ray was then an emaciated figure, ravaged by cancer and years of self-abuse. His simple presence cast the spectre of death, with all its attendant tension and awkwardness. We stayed two weeks before taking a drive-away to the West Coast, spending Christmas with Nick and his companion Susan Schwartz. Knowing it was Nick's last, everyone tried to make it 'a good one'.

I also met Wim Wenders, who came by to visit for an hour, as he had periodically done since working with Nick on *The American Friend*. Nick and Susan confided to us that Wenders had loosely promised a year earlier to help Ray make a film, or find financing, or... At the same time, through Glaudini, they asked if I could help Nick make a last film. I had never seen a Ray film, at least that I remembered, but having some months open, I replied that I would be willing. We left on New Year's Day.

In January, I contacted Wenders by letter and phone from Hawaii, telling him I had two thousand dollars (all I had), and was going to New York to help Nick try to make a film. I was conscious of Wenders' promise to Nick, and asked if he could help raise some production funds. In February, I saw Wenders in Berkeley and was able to secure a promise of three thousand dollars. Preparing to go to New York, I was cautioned by friends who had had their own involvements with Ray. In the 60s and 70s Ray had cut a swathe through the alternative film community, using, and to some abusing, his own legend. All the stories came to bad ends.

I arrived in New York in March and moved into the loft. Nick and Susan, though they had been in touch with me, seemed surprised I had kept my promise. My own feelings were highly mixed—Nick could die at any moment, and at best it was a high risk venture: emotionally, financially, spiritually. And it was difficult for me to imagine Ray having the capacity any more to be lucid, or even the actual energy to work. It was clearly a long-shot gamble—though this was something with which both of us were familiar. After a week or so of





'Lightning Over Water': Nicholas Ray on set.

functionally nursing and talking fragmentarily with Nick, about the limitations of the money we had and his own physical restrictions, it was obvious to me that if he were to do anything, it had to be done in the loft and it had to be extraordinarily simple in that its production would require the greatest physical restraint. Nick would simply not be able to stand the rigours of even a modest level of film work.

About a week after my arrival, Wenders called to say he had obtained \$50,000 for a film—though this would require a treatment or script. With this news Ray seemed to shift into feeling something could be done, and for a week he tried to formulate something, though it was clearly terribly difficult for him (every day he had to be shown again how to turn a microcassette recorder on and off). Wenders, Ray and I had a number of three-way phone calls, trying in halting terms to discuss what had become 'the project'. During these I felt Ray tended to be misleading, asserting he had a script going when he actually had nothing to show.

Wenders scheduled a 'story conference' to be attended by Pierre Cottrell, producer, and Ed Lachman, cameraman. Several days before this, I told Nick I wished to call Wenders on my own, though Nick said he didn't want me to. I called Wenders anyway, feeling a moral obligation to make it clear to him what state Nick was in, and what could be anticipated. Wenders indicated that, over the telephone, he had felt Nick was unclear, and that what he planned was to come to New York for several weeks, to film Nick editing the unfinished film *We Can't Go Home Again*, and that he had arranged for Dennis Hopper and other

past friends of Nick's to come by and visit.

The day of the conference, Ray quickly concocted a 'story'. Nick would direct and play the lead, he would be a dying painter who steals back his old work, replacing it with forgeries. He would have a son who he feared was trying to take his young mistress. He would sail away with a Chinese laundryman, having recovered his past and his self-esteem. At the conference Ray spun this to Lachman, Cottrell and me, and enquired what we thought of it. They both answered encouragingly, saying it was fine, with small technical reservations. At my turn, I replied that I felt it was unrealistic to think Nick could play the lead and direct, or take the film out of the loft. Nick asked me if I had phoned Wenders and I answered honestly.

The next morning, Susan took me aside and asked me to leave, saying I was being disruptive and was spreading 'negative vibrations'. Since from the outset I had said I would take whatever role was required, I arranged to leave. The same day, I telephoned Wenders to tell him what had happened. My feeling was that the surge of film people, with their own energies and interests, was taking over, and that unless extreme care was taken to see Nick for what he was, a terribly sick and desperate man, it would only come to tragedy. Wenders said he would be in New York in a week to begin filming, and I asked him to please go live with Ray a week before he began work—to do this so that he could gauge from direct experience what Nick's condition was and what could humanely be expected of him. I left the following day.

In the next weeks, I stopped by to gather some of my things, and Nick's loft

was busy with people. He was trying to write his script, since Wenders' arrival was imminent. I showed him how to work his microcassette machine. He seemed lost. I left New York on a trip several days before Wenders' arrival, and returned in early May. Under the press of time, Wenders had begun shooting immediately. A week later, Nick was in hospital. Susan enthused that thirty hours of film had been shot, and the budget was going up. On 15 May 1979, I saw Nick one last time. He had just returned home from hospital. I asked him, 'How did it go, Nick? How is the film?' He looked at me out of his one good eye and said, 'Terrible. It's awful. Don't like it at all.'

Postscript: In May 1980, *Nick's Film* was shown at Cannes, receiving a generally bad press. Shortly after, Wenders withdrew the film from festival commitments and took it for reworking. A second version, *Lightning Over Water*, was released: a voice-over commentary by Wenders provides an explanatory 'text'. In a melodramatic, *film noir* tone, Wenders tries to have his truth and eat it: the film is a fiction, he says, and with this facile twist tries, though he transparently fails, to defuse the most damning aspects of this painful film.

Some items. About one-third through the film, Wenders exclaims that looking at rushes from the shooting had disclosed what his eyes had not seen: that Ray was dying in front of him. It is an appalling and pathetic admission: one only needed eyes and a human heart. Wenders describes seeing Nick being driven away to hospital, but offers no thoughts on why. He comments on the icy precision of the film's imagery, that in the middle



of filming he had felt they aestheticised the truth in front of him, and that this was a sign of his own fears. Without a trace of irony, the film continues in the same visual vein, with further scenes, surely done later, after Nick's death: glassy aerials of New York, a bombastic swooping helicopter flight beneath the span of Verrazano Bridge, as if somehow these technical exercises would cleanse the film's moral uncertainty.

In an astounding scene, Wenders lies curled, as if wounded, on a sterile hospital bed, while Ray sits beside him asking, 'What are you doing here? Standing on my back.' And seeming to lose whatever 'lines' he had, he begins a tirade as the camera holds mercilessly on his even more devastated face. 'Wim, you make me sick to my stomach ... ah, I should have done something funny. I could have puked all over you, that'd be funny.' Drained of this venom beneath cold light, Nick asks that they stop. Wenders' voice off-screen, low: 'Then say cut.' Nick: 'Cut ... cut ... cut.' The camera keeps gazing, appallingly, and Wenders' voice, low, to his cameraman, says, 'No, don't cut.' Nick's head lolls back and forth, 'No, don't cut, don't cut.' One might admire Wenders' 'honesty' in retaining this scene; one can hardly admire the callous manipulation it betrays.

'How'd it go, Nick?' I asked. 'Terrible. It's awful.' You're damned right. And he even stuck your name on it.

The film business has long been noted for cruelty and harshness. In his last months, Nick Ray needed something for himself, though perhaps he didn't know what that was. It certainly wasn't this movie, which clearly he did know. What Ray needed, simply, was love. Instead he got a crew who seem to perceive life only through the mechanical devices of film. They rolled over him with a movie-making machine, and now they even choose to display the carnage. □

# LIGHTNING OVER WATER

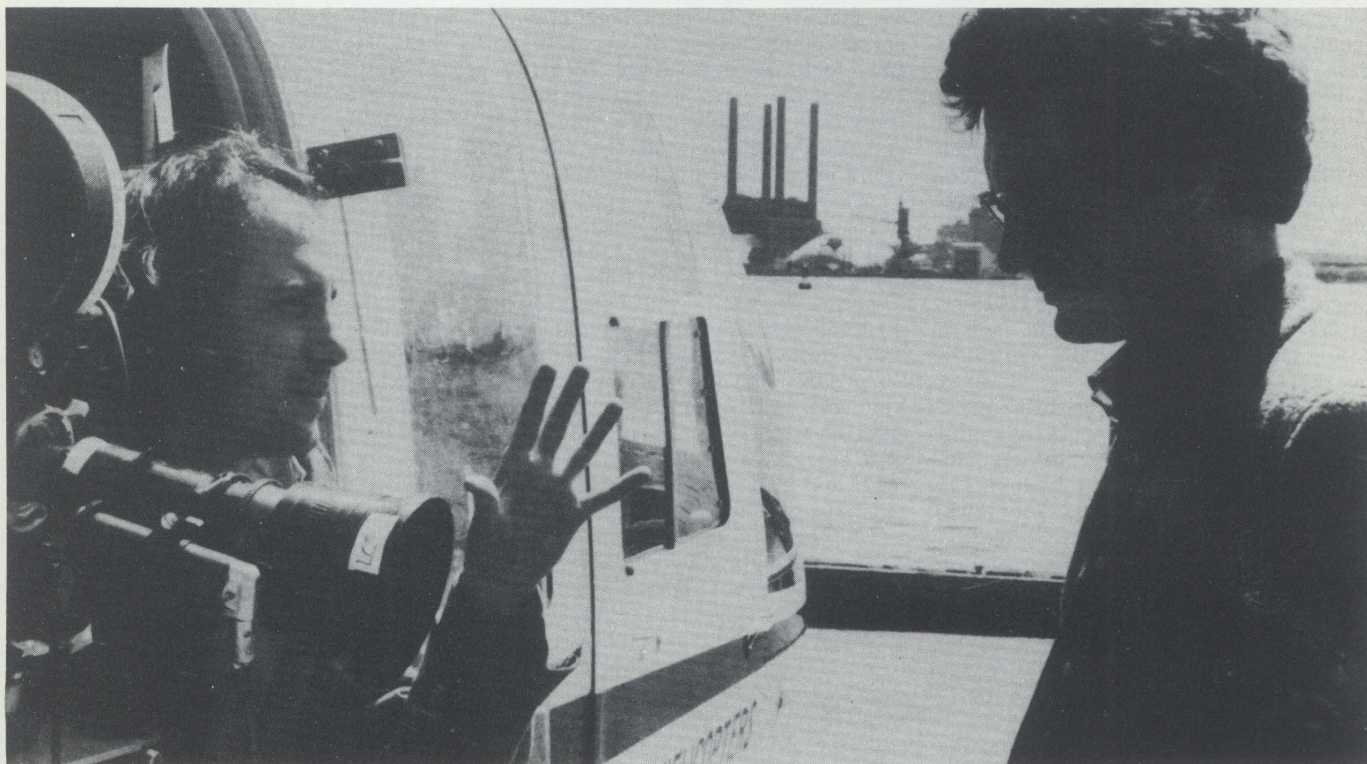
## Richard Combs

*Lightning Over Water* was shot in April and May 1979, in the last few weeks before Nicholas Ray died of cancer. Wim Wenders has given Ray co-director credit and at one time had as a subtitle 'Nick's Film'; he has also put himself squarely into the film, so that it is finally less a portrait than the account of a relationship, and a cinematic one at that, which could be termed very much of our times. In the first shot, New York at dawn, Wenders is seen arriving on the corner of Spring Street and West Broadway where Ray lives in a SoHo loft. In hushed tones, uneasily redolent of somebody's parody of what he thought a Nick Ray film was like, he describes how the night flight from Los Angeles brought him in on a cool and clear day, how 'I was here to see Nick' whose films 'have their place in the history of cinema', and how he first climbed those darkened stairs two years ago to ask Ray to play in *The American Friend*. 'We made it together, we played a lot of backgammon too, and we became good friends.' Wenders, doyen of the New German Cinema, has taken two weeks out of pre-production on *Hammett*, which he is making for Francis Coppola, doyen of New Hollywood, to visit one of

the legendary casualties of old Hollywood, who sailed off into obscurity, in apparent fulfilment of one of his films' most famous lines, 'I'm a stranger here myself', eventually finding work on an endless student movie whose title, *We Can't Go Home Again*, completes a couplet that might be his epitaph.

The stage would thus seem set for a grisly *hommage*, actually on the brink of the grave. Young cinéphiles pawing over the corpse of the *cinéma de papa* should be a less than edifying spectacle. The film-makers'—and Ray's—determination to commit something to film before the subject gives out is a little disturbing. That the subject wished it on himself is arguably no defence of the movie groupies who rushed in to take advantage of a mortally ill man. It might also be argued as no defence that Wenders concedes the project's distasteful aspects as he goes along: displaying his own artifice by cutting in rough video footage showing how scenes are set up and a 'performance' is nursed out of Ray; worrying that the pressures of making a film leave him no time to be concerned for Ray as a human being.

Wenders' voice-over even creates problems for itself in this respect. It is over-fastidious in calling attention to the stricken sensibilities behind the camera, the heroic fineness of their doubts and fears in the living presence of Death. And yet one of the most ironic and intriguing aspects of the situation goes virtually unmentioned. Ray was a 'personal' director who finally could not live with Hollywood and set out into the wilderness to find something truer to himself; Wenders is a director at a time when the 'personal' cinema is in, yet whose films acknowledge their emotional and spiritual debt to Hollywood Ray (such acknowledgments, in fact, are the *sine qua non* of the new auteurs). Wenders flying in from his ten million dollar *Hammett* to genuflect



Wim Wenders (right) preparing aerial sequence of 'Lightning Over Water'.



before the broken and dying Ray might even smack of Bogdanovichism at its worst. The topic does crop up in one brief exchange, and Wenders commemorates Ray's reply in his film's title, a cryptically poetic image that raises the whole question of what the two auteurs mean to each other: 'For one per cent of that I could make (long pause) lightning over water.'

This much admitted, however, it must be said that there is something heroic about Wenders' project. Given his own central performance in it, and the occasionally painful obtrusiveness of his commentary, it could hardly be said that he has effaced himself before his subject. But his act of *hommage* is often on the point of becoming a curious act of osmosis. Admitting his own uncertainty about how to make a film with the dying Ray, Wenders seems almost to want to bequeath the film to him, to have it become his last work, an encapsulation perhaps of the unwieldy *We Can't Go Home Again*. A strange labyrinth opens up here. Wenders, in search of direction, wants Ray to lead him, to take over the film; he casts himself, in effect, as the bewildered young protagonist of a Ray movie who despairs of parental understanding and guidance. But Wenders is also a film-maker who has found the image for his alienation and oedipal odysseys (*Kings of the Road*, *Alice in the Cities*) in Ray's work, not to mention his previous act of wilful cross-cultural identification, adapting Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* into a Germanic *Johnny Guitar*. Whatever *Lightning Over Water* reveals about their personal relationship, in imaginative terms it seems to represent Wenders' own 'coming home'.

If the central issue of the film for Wenders is direction, for Ray it is control. It was for that reason, after all, that he abandoned Hollywood to begin his own odyssey, his attempt to identify with

the generation he had championed in *They Live By Night* and *Rebel Without a Cause*. Ironically enough, that generation, as represented by Wenders, has sought him out and honoured him for what he was in Hollywood. But the director Ray wanted to become is represented by *We Can't Go Home Again*, the film which began in Chicago in 1968, when Ray tried to set up a project dealing with the conspiracy trials, then continued with his teaching appointment in an upstate New York college, and like a snowball seemed to go on forever collecting the confusions and anxieties of a generation which Ray had made his own (much as it went on collecting film materials and techniques). Ray is seen here, still screening, editing and worrying over the film just before his death—apparently confirming the verdict of those who have said he was an individualist who needed the discipline of the studio.

Meanwhile at Vassar College, where Wenders films a lecture given by Ray, *The Lusty Men* is screened. After the elegiac sequence in which Robert Mitchum limps out of the paper-strewn rodeo ground to make his journey back to the derelict home where he finds comics and an old gun still in their hiding place, Wenders tells Ray, 'It's more about coming home than anything I've seen.' *Lightning Over Water* contains both images, both versions of Ray, and while Wenders is insistent, like a good auteurist, on the importance of where Ray has been, he is willing, as a final gift, to have him take this film in another direction, as formally inchoate as *We Can't Go Home Again*, perhaps, but as direct and painful in its need for self-reckoning.

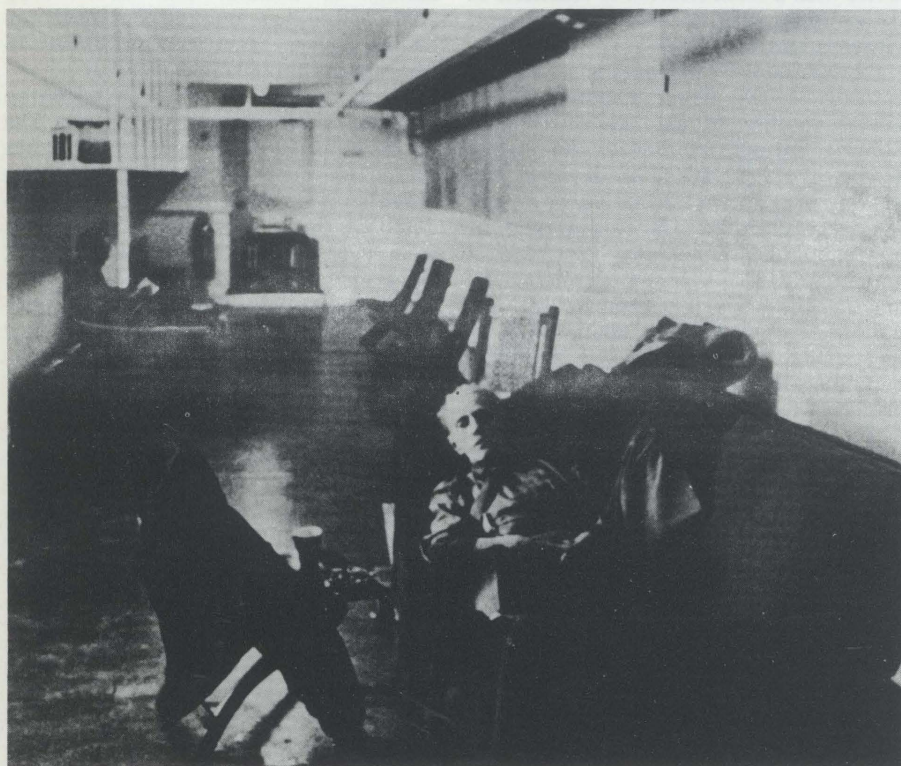
At the beginning of his Vassar address, Ray announces, 'I am, and you are now, in the process of making a film.' This is presumably a reference to Wenders' undertaking. But it is hard to know what is being referred to when, after compar-

ing *The Lusty Men*—developed during its shooting from only twenty-six pages of script—to his current project, and describing research in Washington which revealed that what people wanted most of all was a home of their own, he declares, 'That is what this is all about.' When he then announces, 'The closer I get to my ending, the closer I am to rewriting any beginning,' he could be taking in *The Lusty Men*, *We Can't Go Home Again* and *Lightning Over Water*.

Not so much rewriting the beginning, perhaps, as finding a new one is what *Lightning Over Water* is about. There is a lot of discussion over what kind of story the film should tell, and it does seem to have been the intention at one stage that this should be an acted-out film with a script and all the trimmings. Fragments of this remain, in between the ciné-vérité and self-reflective footage: Wenders' dawn arrival in the loft, for instance, or the later 'drama' of Ray being suddenly whisked off to hospital. But the 'story' element never comes together, perhaps because of Ray's health, but just as likely because he was no longer disposed to working that way. Film had become a means of turning over pieces of his own life, of reconstructing identity; it was probably in the nature of this final stage of his creative life that *We Can't Go Home Again* should remain forever unfinished. The film—*Lightning Over Water* and within that the 'film' Ray and Wenders discuss making—is the story of 'A man who wants to bring himself all together before he dies.'

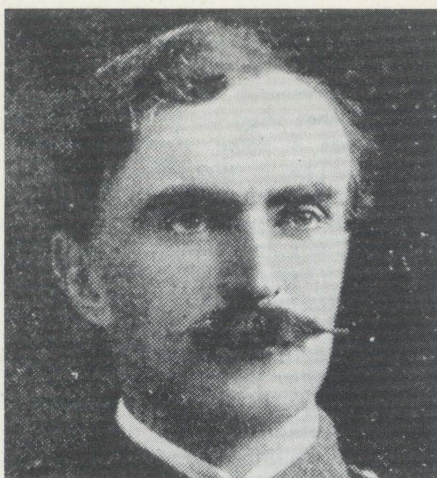
At one point, Ray reads to Wenders a story outline about a once famous painter who can't sell any of his current output and who, in order to regain his past and his self-esteem, steals his paintings from the galleries and replaces them with forgeries. Wenders tells him that he should drop the fictional pretence and make it about himself; to which Ray replies, 'Then it has to be about you, too.' Pressed further about how he would find himself in a film in which the action would be Ray's, Wenders declares, 'My action is going to be determined by yours, my action is going to be determined by your facing death.'

The scene again is uncomfortably self-conscious, the exchange of mutual politenesses about creative responsibility a little precious. But its tentativeness, even its evasiveness, is crystallised in the film's linking sequences of a Chinese junk drifting eerily into New York, then leaving again to celebrate a wake after Ray's death. Its justification is Ray's earlier declaration, when asked how he would like 'their' film to end, 'I'm going to hold out for a Chinese junk, sailing out festooned with red flags.' In the event, the junk is festooned with ribbons of film, flapping from a moviola on deck while a camera slowly rotates of its own accord. The image is Ray's—the junk is linked with the idea of sailing off to find a cure for cancer—and the action, with its abstracting aerial views, is Wenders'. The final effect, a romanticism which seems both insidious and adventurous, attests to the deepest level of their collaboration on a project which, in a sense, never happens. ■

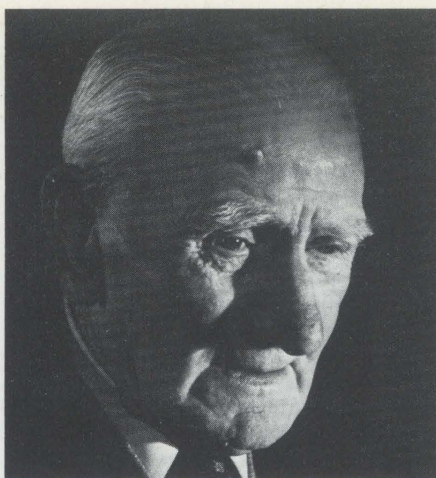


Ray outside the Vassar auditorium.





The heroic O'Rahilly.



Vinny Byrne: the old IRA.

# TWO NATIONS

Earlier this year, in *The Troubles* and *Ireland: A Television History*, Thames TV and BBC TV, the latter in association with RTE, both offered an under-informed public accounts of Irish history, past and present. Here JOHN PYM considers the series' methods of address and the limitations and strengths of television 'history'.

The oral tradition, with roots in Gaelic Ireland, remains a powerful influence on, and contributory factor to, the course of Irish history. And it is only half a cliché to note, for example, as do both series under consideration, that Cromwell is still vividly remembered in Ireland. Although the fruits of pre-Christian Gaelic culture—other than those that can still be photographed—are hardly mentioned by Robert Kee, architect of *Ireland: A Television History*, the tenets of the oral tradition have, subconsciously perhaps, gone some way to mould his approach to the ordering of a survey of Irish history from the twelfth to the twentieth century.

Kee's is above all 'spoken' history, his listeners, like the poet's, are gathered at the hearth; and, while a modern television audience has not the patience for the intellectually warming delights of an epic tale wrapped in a skein of conventions and internal rhythms, it does expect another, modern sort of wizardry. That the teller of the tale not only appears to hold in his head, but also actually to *know*—like Lord Clark and Dr Bronowski—what he is talking about. The act of listening to this kind of 'prestige' storyteller, and of watching him as well, requires for it to work a certain sense of audience wonderment, an unconscious submission to the story and the authority of the teller.

This is not to suggest that Robert Kee, a man who, on television at least, combines modesty with both gravity and urbanity, sets out to present himself as a sage. He wears his scholarship lightly; his

is a serious, disinterested but nevertheless primarily a popular history. His modest purpose, suggested in the first episode, is to 'ungarble' history. But the significance of the 'story' itself is illustrated by the fact that the strongest of Kee's twelve episodes (a thirteenth, not seen at the time of writing, wraps up the series with a consideration of reactions to it) are those with the most coherent and vigorous narrative lines.

One of *Ireland's* episodes is given over entirely to the Great Famine of the 1840s, another to the life of Charles Stewart Parnell, another to the Easter Rising of 1916. To have devoted one quarter of a survey of 800 years to two relatively short periods of time and to one individual (albeit and his times) is not, in this case, so much an indication of the intrinsic importance of the Famine, Parnell and the Rising—important though all three were—but rather, paradoxically, an acknowledgment of the primacy of the 'story' over the television picture.

Although there is, of course, no mid-nineteenth century movie film of the eviction of the poor or of starving children reduced to eating grass and berries, the Famine was, in a more fundamental sense, tailored for television 'history'. It has at its centre a general truth that can be put in a sentence. Throughout the Famine, large quantities of food, other than potatoes, were being produced in and exported from Ireland. One remembers this: for once, it seems, there are no 'ifs' and 'buts'. While not disavowing his television series, which he claims gives a

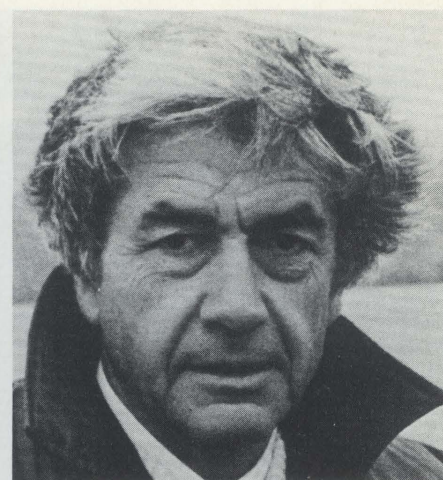


different and in some ways broader picture than his substantial published history of Ireland, *The Green Flag* (1972), Kee has pointed out that the medium gives scant encouragement to 'conceptual' thought.

To present the Famine on television does not require conceptual thought. The potato crop failed not once, or twice, but *three* times; those, the majority, who relied on it as their only food starved to death by the hundreds of thousand; aid from England was pitifully inadequate; mass emigration followed. Detail these events in almost any way, and you have compelling television. Contemporary illustrations are judiciously used to suggest the plight of the Irish peasantry; but television, even here, has an opportunity: a gnarled hand cuts open a blighted potato, and the finality of the repeated failure of the potato crop is encapsulated in a single image. Cecil Woodham-Smith, the historian of the Famine, has like Kee described the 'drama' of the catastrophe (and gone further than Kee in encouraging conceptual thought among readers), but there is no way of reproducing in print the effect of the actual *look* of a rotten potato.

Kee's difficulty in the pre-twentieth century episodes was how to communicate ideas as opposed to a chronology of events. In the case of the Famine, how to





Above: Robert Kee.

Left: In Dublin, the aftermath of Easter Week—the O'Rahilly's *De Dion Bouton*?

render comprehensible England's attitude: how was it possible that almost nothing of any substance was done to alleviate the suffering of the poor people of Ireland? His solution was to have English government policy personified by the figure of Sir Charles Trevelyan, the man most directly responsible for authorising relief. He is portrayed by an actor, forever scratching away with a quill, looking ever more worried, hidebound by economic theory, fearful of the consequences of 'giving' food to the destitute. This is fair enough as far as it goes; but the problem really is, is he not just an actor, a means in a sense of making do? This is not narrated history: we are no longer in thrall to the omniscient teller. 'Here is something you ought to know, and I need this device to explain it.'

In the case of Parnell another actor is used, but here, since Parnell holds centre stage and Kee's role is for once that of interlocutor, the effect is somewhat different. We are held in thrall, but by Parnell himself. Instead of having him scratching stagily away, he is discovered in a black and white *Punch* illustration rising (quite convincingly) in the House of Commons from among his fellow-MPs, or in long shot, a figure of mysterious unknowability, strolling with Mrs O'Shea across an expanse of grassy parkland. For Kee, Parnell is as interesting as a human

being as he is as a political creature. Here is an insight to his political perspective; not necessarily wrong, but dovetailed to the medium of television. Why Parnell was incapable of seeing that his liaison with Kitty, a liaison he apparently regarded as quite 'natural', would lead eventually to his political ruin, is a question which intrigues Kee. Reduced, unfairly, to its most basic level this is television soap opera rather than television history. This said, however, the episode on Parnell is fascinating: because in a sense history and soap opera fortuitously conjoin.

It is in the episode on the Easter Rising that Kee's method comes into its own. Not only has the master storyteller led us with effect down the major byways of Irish nationalism, sketched the background with suggestive ease, if he hasn't told us everything, at least he knows it, but at last we have the live witnesses and the film: the climax which wasn't a climax; the climax in effect but not in actuality. (There is a sense of muddling dénouement in the episodes following the Rising—the Terror, the Civil War, the almost unheralded birth of the Republic. The mood of these latter years, and of Kee's attitude, is best summed up, perhaps, by a former Irish Minister, Noel Browne, when he wryly expatiates on the frustrations of attempting to govern with

the Archbishop of Dublin forever looking over your shoulder.)

In dealing with the Rising, Kee's authority is pre-eminent. It is not just that, as in the case of the Famine, the story itself is tinged with tragic irony, or that the story tells itself, but that it can be personalised with such force. History recalled. It is also, importantly, spoken history recalled in human terms: Dublin is a city which can still be walked in comfort. The Rising becomes retrospectively a Great Event, enclosed in a prophylactic. Unlike, say, the Civil War ('We were shot like rabbits,' a Republican irregular recalls with undisguised bitterness from exile in Canada), those who fought in the Easter Rising, even if they didn't strictly speaking 'fight', recall the past with a fondness born of official esteem. It is, for them at least, television history as celebration. This is not, of course, true for all those who recall its aftermath. James Connolly's daughter, bearing an uncanny resemblance to her father, describes in harrowing detail, on Irish archive footage, her last meeting with her father; and Tom Clarke's widow offers similarly grief-stricken testimony.

Kee's expository method throughout the series relies heavily on the dramatic moment: television works this way, the synthetic approach to exposition being too concentrated for the half-viewer, however enthralled. Kee chooses his dramatic moments with care. He has a taste for heroism, and the figure who in a way is seen, in almost abstract terms, as the touchstone of the Rising, the Great Event, is Michael O'Rahilly, the O'Rahilly. A founder of the Volunteers, O'Rahilly was opposed to the Rising; he was, however, in Yeats' phrase, 'the man who helped to wind the clock and so came to hear it strike.' (This being a spoken history, Kee is not averse to repeating the telling phrase or famous declaration.)

The reason the O'Rahilly comes to the fore in this television history is perhaps for the very unhistorical reason that he has such a handsome bearing and because he drove to the Rising in a De Dion Bouton car (a photograph of the burnt-out shell of which is subsequently shown). The story of his departure in the car and his farewell to his family is told





Ireland in the 70s: British incomprehension at Ulster violence. A soldier is struck on the head during a riot.

by his niece, a woman of striking authority and a cast of mind not, one imagines, dissimilar to Kee's. She tells another incident about the death of a British officer, Colonel Fane, who having led his men straight into an ambush in Northumberland Road nevertheless drew his sword and won the admiration of the men who shot him dead, the irony of which one senses Kee approves. This incident finds an echo in the account of another eye witness who describes the O'Rahilly's own death, leading a charge—well in front—from the Post Office down Moore Street. He crossed himself before expiring. Something admirable in all the muddle.

Those who describe the Rising almost without exception enjoy doing so. They are up to a point conspiring with their questioner, the unseen Kee, in embalming the event. What we ultimately feel about the Rising, however, having watched and listened to Kee's account, is largely to do with what we subjectively feel about the witnesses, and what we feel about them depends partly on the conviction with which they present themselves. How far do you trust a man with rather wild mutton-chop whiskers as opposed to a man with short, neatly combed hair? In the end, as in the case of the paradox of the Famine, Kee turns back to simplicities, good television; the fact that the Rising burnt a place in modern Irish history was because the English were foolhardy enough to execute its leaders. This being spoken history, there is a fixing quotation: 'It was like watching a stream of blood coming from under a closed door.'

Kee's is, it must be said, a gentlemanly view of history. As an old *Panorama* hand he could, one feels, have spoken to Parnell, interviewed him, man to man, firmly but with discretion. His own feelings are only occasionally revealed: there is a reverential ring to a phrase like 'the great Southern Irish regiments' (with reference to Irishmen fighting beside the English in the First World War); a distinct chill towards a man like Pearse, obsessed with his 'blood sacrifice'; an

admiration for Michael Collins. Irish history for Kee, striding hither and yon in suit and windbreaker, having learned his lines (or so it seems), is above all manageable. However bungled the rising, or bloody the reprisal, reason and a certain amount of order can be made to prevail.

*The Troubles*, a five-part series written by the documentarist Richard Broad but drawing on the work of a collaborative team, uses many of the techniques of *Ireland: A Television History*. Horses are made to clop, rifle bolts to snap and cars to putter in what was once silent film. Archive footage is repeated: Carson reviews his followers, royalty arrives in Ireland in holiday mood (though *Ireland*, thanks to the RTE connection, has annexed the anniversary interviews with the survivors of the Rising). Several of the same witnesses are called upon.

*The Troubles*, however, as its Irish title suggests, is not a 'television history', tailored as the BBC/RTE series was for transmission to a middle-of-the-road audience in both Eire and the United Kingdom (at the time of writing Kee's handsome book-of-the-series is top of the bestseller list in Britain). *The Troubles* is partisan television, not so much in the sense that it takes sides as that its purpose is to fuel debate. It focuses on Ulster, providing a context for what has occurred there since 1969. Irish history becomes a prelude to this period.

The series is unified by a commentary spoken by an unseen actress, Rosalie Crutchley, who adopts a tone of uniform flatness, as if to banish through non-humaneness any sense of sides being taken. (Kee, on the other hand, establishes his disinterested bona fides by his very look.) Subjectively, however, one should note that the effect of such a grey style of narration is to suggest that desperation is the keynote of *anything* to do with Ulster. *The Troubles* is not one man's view of history, it is rather a certain sort of consensus: Glen Barr, a Protestant, and Michael Farrell, a Catholic, both—now on television, it seems—reasonable men, give their opinions on

episodes in contemporary history in separate, book-lined rooms. Historians, notably Dr A. T. Q. Stewart, of Queen's University, Belfast, are called to describe and interpret from various viewpoints. Witnesses are filmed in a careful pattern of close-ups, one from the right, the next from the left, against an anonymous dark background (as if the clothes and the posture adopted—Sean MacBride is almost grotesquely hunched in Kee's interviews—are in danger of in some fashion editorialising).

*The Troubles* is not on the whole a history of emblematic dramatic moments. The Famine passes in the course of a fast, one-episode summary of pre-1916 Irish history: the third failure of the potato crop, from which Kee extracted so much dramatic moment, passes unremarked. The effect is of a single broad wash. The camera pans along rows of blighted potato plants, without showing the actual rotten potato. A helicopter circles ruined buildings: history from the air, at a distance. Kee, for all the turgidity of the early episodes when there was little actually to show, favours wandering on the ground, standing on Vinegar Hill, pointing out what the extremity of the Pale looks like today.

A phrase such as 'the great Southern Irish regiments' would be anathema to *The Troubles* team. The testimony of 'individuals' is to be approached with caution. A person of apparent charm, Michael O'Rahilly's niece, when filmed in three-quarter length and interviewed by Robert Kee, whose point of view after eight episodes we have come to know, is a changed if not an entirely different person in *The Troubles*, where she is seen in close-up with her comments edited into much briefer time-slots. She is, of course, still a 'witness' in *The Troubles*, but from time to time her testimony is curiously impersonal. Why, for instance, have her impart in a cut-away the information of Connolly's execution? She is in this instance not an individual but simply someone who was in Dublin in 1916: she stands in for





(RTE television footage.)

thousands of others who heard, and were enraged by, the news that Connolly, too ill to stand, was shot sitting in a chair. No need, here, for information on the De Dion Bouton.

Another telling example of how the two series use their witnesses is the case of Vinny Byrne, a one-time member of Michael Collins' Dublin squad which was responsible for, among other acts of 'terrorism', the murder in November 1920 of fourteen British undercover agents. When interviewed by Kee, he recounts in detail his part in the killing of two of these men, without remorse and even managing to lighten the description with a wry aside on the maid who opened the door to him and guessed what work he was on. He himself shot the two men in cold blood. The same killings are described, more briefly, in *The Troubles*; this time, however, sensing that his questioners are not perhaps so 'understanding' as Kee, an indefinable sense of what can only be described as furtiveness creeps into his voice. He is not quite so self-assured. The colouring changes.

Both *The Troubles* and *Ireland* go figuratively on to the street for the representative voice. Both describe twentieth century atrocities: the latter has an old soft-voiced woman recounting, with unemotional resignation, the summary execution of a tubercular boy who had offered himself instead of his father; the former an outburst from a woman, whose anger is as overstated as the other's was muted, describing a mutilated corpse. *The Troubles* has a distinctly grizzled former member of the Black and Tans describe the meaning of the burnt cork that hung from the trigger shield of his rifle (we burnt half Cork, and we'll burn your house too); *Ireland's* Black and Tan witnesses are carefully restrained (this, after all, is for Irish transmission). *Ireland* does not underplay the role of the Auxiliaries and the Black and Tans, but characteristic of its approach towards them (and of Kee's 'dramatic moments' approach generally) is the long and detailed logistical description of the IRA's most successful ambush at Kilmichael,

County Cork, when a flying column commanded by Tom Barry killed all eighteen members of a British patrol.

The factual history of Ireland's partition in the twentieth century as given by the two series is not substantially different, though Kee concludes his survey earlier than the Thames team. Kee, however, has the edge in drawing the *distanced* moral from the straightforward narrative: he contrasts the unhampered landing of guns at Larne in April 1914 for the Ulster Volunteer Force, and the landing of guns at Howth a few months later for the Irish Volunteers, an act which the Army firmly tried to prevent with resultant bloodshed. 'The bitterness this caused at the very moment when nationalists were being thwarted over the fulfilment of their aspirations which the Government had promised them, made the two conflicting attitudes to the Ulster problem more irreconcilable still.' Quite so.

Where Thames' closer focus pays off, however, is in its marshalling of facts: its proof, by diagrams, electoral rolls, and maps, of the reality of Ulster gerrymandering. At one point, it shows part of a most telling documentary made in the 50s detailing exactly who was housed where in the council property in the town of Fintona, County Tyrone: discrimination against Roman Catholic family after named Roman Catholic family is proved beyond doubt. This sort of primary evidence is crucial ammunition in any debate on the state of the province before the Civil Rights movement of the late 60s gained momentum. (Kee shows part of the same documentary but substitutes his own comments.)

When, in *Ireland: A Television History*, De Valera is first heard actually to speak (in a surprisingly reedy voice), one senses history turning into current affairs. Kee, having mapped the background, begins to wind down. *The Troubles* embraces the challenge: the moment when, unlike De Valera fortuitously caught by the camera addressing a crowd, the politician directly addresses his television constitu-

ency, when the hunger striker pulls himself up in bed to answer the one allowable question before the television camera.

The strength of the last two episodes of *The Troubles*, where the 'witnesses' are for the most part talking directly to the (archive) television camera, is in the peculiar, jolting effect of seeing yesterday's news as particularly bloody 'current affairs'. Running through the chronology of events in Ulster since 1969 (with the studious exclusion of the unfiltered 'terrorist' perspective, Protestant or Roman Catholic) is, for once, to be forced into recognising the reality of an ignored, low-intensity war. The picture is one of absolute gloom: the ungarbled past appears to offer no cause for future comfort.

We return, however, again to the difficulty of rendering ideas—or states of mind—on television. What people outside Ireland do not understand, Dr Stewart explains, is that there is a set way to conduct a riot, there is a correct way, passed on, to burn a bus. This is real oral history as opposed to an evening in front of the television set. It is possible, as *The Troubles* does, to show a fireman shovelling up the remains of a victim of a Provisional IRA bomb, but it is another question altogether—even were it permitted—to lay open the thoughts of the bomber, the reason for the bomb having been planted. To explain why the man who shot two undercover agents in cold blood in November 1920 undoubtedly feels as little remorse as his present-day counterparts. Television can show an incensed Brian Faulkner, having been thwarted in the Power-Sharing Assembly by Dr Paisley, furiously loquacious: but what he *says* does not get to the heart of the matter. The past, on television, can be marshalled with some success, can be made manageable; but the present remains, for all its vividness, a largely unknown country.

*Ireland: A History*, by Robert Kee, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, £9.95.

*The Troubles*, editor Taylor Downing, Thames TV/Macdonald Futura, £4.95.



RECONSIDERING 'TRIUMPH OF THE WILL'

# WAS HITLER THERE?

BRIAN WINSTON

It is now 1981. Seventy-eight years after the birth of Leni Riefenstahl; forty-six years after Adolf Hitler flew again to Nuremberg to review the columns of his faithful followers; forty-six years since he (days before making that flight) wiped out his own Left in an episode known to history as the Röhm Putsch; forty-five years since Riefenstahl constructed a film record of that healing event, the 6th Congress of the National German Workers' Party, and thereby earned for herself a seemingly dislodgable place in the auteurist pantheon; it is eighteen years since the serious business of the Riefenstahl industry began. The time to reconsider her and *Triumph of the Will* is long past.

The received opinion of Leni Riefenstahl's documentaries is that they are works of great artistic power which embody 'a vicious ideology'. They were made by 'an authentic genius', 'in a class of her own'; but they were also made by 'an artist of an immensely naive political nature', 'ignorant of the outside world'. Apart from the viciousness of the ideology (a viciousness which Riefenstahl has never disavowed), none of this can stand.

A cursory knowledge of how films are made reveals the limits of applying auteurist theory to works shot and edited, as this was, by many hands. The iconography of *Triumph of the Will* is not accidentally fascist (by virtue, as it were, of its fascist subject matter) but a veritable source and true reflection of Nazi pictorial preferences, which were

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'On September 5 1934

20 years

after the outbreak  
of the World War

16 years

after the start  
of German suffering

19 months

after the beginning  
of Germany's rebirth

Adolf Hitler flew  
again to Nuremberg  
to review the columns  
of his faithful followers.'

Opening Titles  
*Triumph des Willens*  
(*Triumph of the Will*)

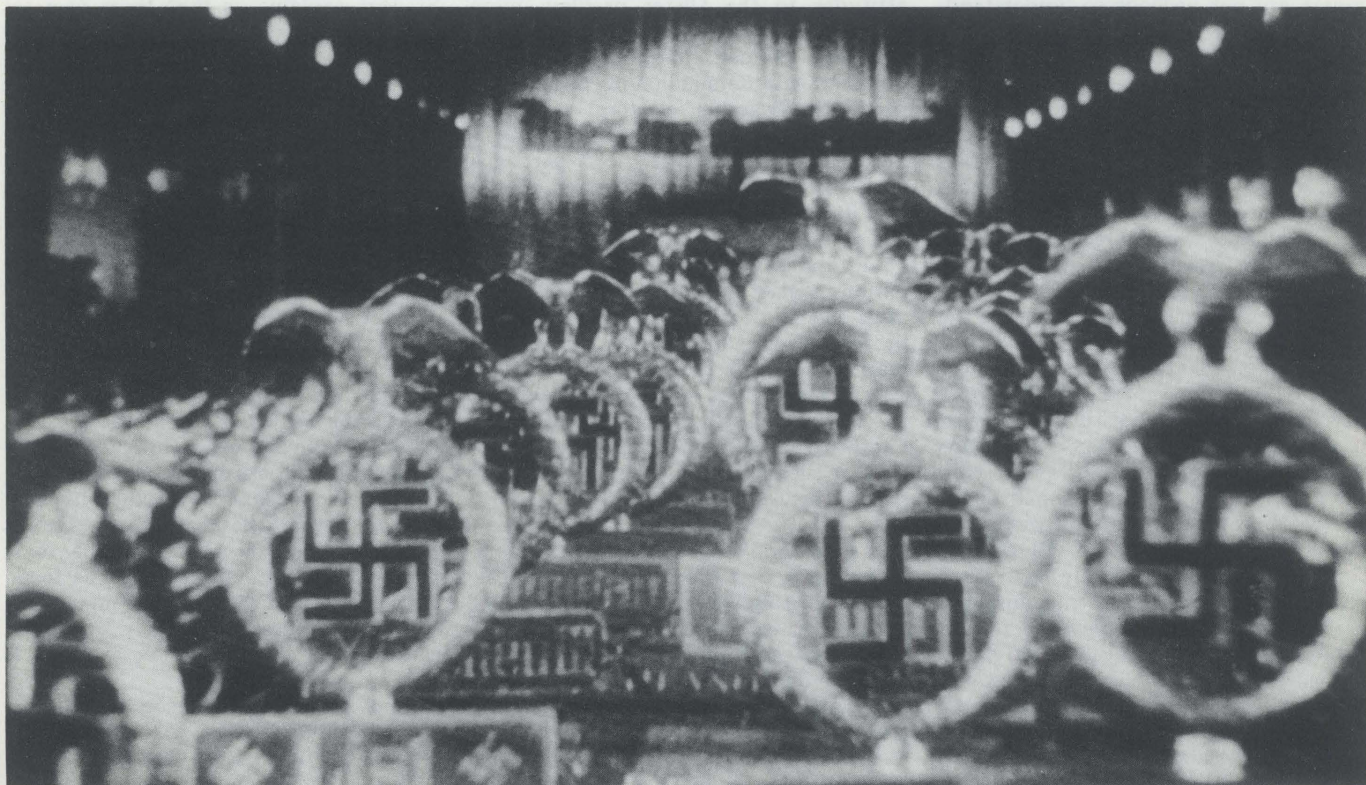
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Riefenstahl's preferences also. Given our taste for the spectacle of the dehumanised mass (that part of fascist aesthetics which we all share), shots of 200,000 men in close formation become impressive not through the fact of filming, but because of the formation itself. Riefenstahl is as impressive as the next film-maker when she has that sort of spectacle to work with; but *Triumph of the Will*, with its tours of medieval Nuremberg, its folk parades and boy scout horseplay, its endless drives and dull speeches, is not for the most part that. All in all, what characterises the 107 minutes of film is a typically fascist gigantism, a lack of proportion, a failure to know when to stop.

It is only in the selection of speeches and incidents that Riefenstahl reveals a real skill. She is at least the equal of contemporary American political image-makers, for *Triumph of the Will* contains an orchestrated defence of Hitler's actions after the Röhm Putsch which could hardly have been organised as such by anybody other than a fully conscious political animal.

As to the film's effectiveness as propaganda, it was not widely used in Germany at the time, being crass and boring and too obviously about Hitler's difficulties with the SA. It is probably fair to say that for every fascist convert the film has made (and these do not, of course, include Riefenstahl's cinéaste admirers who, to a man, maintain their ability to resist her message), there must be many more who have learned from the film something of the central rottenness of the world Hitler and his party created, especially when it was re-edited by the enemies of Nazidom and used against them. This is a strange accolade to be finding in the literature on 'a masterpiece of film propaganda', 'the most successfully, most purely propagandistic film ever made'.

Above all, perhaps, Riefenstahl's manipulation of material, a manipulation one finds surprising given the resources at her command, stretches the limits of editing (and, to a lesser extent, reconstructional) practices to a point where it becomes permissible to ask—if one knew no better—'Was Hitler really there?'





Covering an event with more than one camera is, as any director charged with such a task will tell you, a co-operative effort. However well briefed and instructed, the camera operators must be largely left to their own devices. On *Triumph of the Will* Riefenstahl had a minimum of forty-nine cameramen, many from the newsreels dressed in SA uniforms wandering at will, but nineteen of them senior cinematographers from the mainstream of the industry.\* To give Riefenstahl credit for what they photographed is to stretch the auteurist conceit to breaking point. One of her Olympic film crew, Henry Jaworsky, attested in an interview (*Film Culture*, 1973) that she had a good grasp of technicalities. This is not surprising, given the years she had spent in the business as an actress and director and the co-operative nature of location work on her early mountain films. But his description of her behaviour, which presumably also applies to *Triumph of the Will*, is a more instructive picture of the film director as logistics supervisor: 'She would rush around from one cameraman to the other like a maniac saying—how are you doing? how about this and this? screaming and hollering, oh she was an absolute maniac, she was wild.'

How then did her cameramen do? The amount of material which is either out of focus or reframed in mid-shot suggests that they did not do as well as is normally suggested by the critical acclaim the film has received. Of course, the aerials of the marching columns, the general view of the City of Tents, the arrival of the battle standards in the Luitpold Hall and the Ceremony of the Fallen are impressive, because such massiveness impresses itself automatically on us. But even in these sequences not all the operation is good. At other points in the film the spray gun technique of the newsreel men is more apparent in shots which crab and track from little to less. There is also the occasional yank to centre frame the object of the shot. One can only agree with one of Riefenstahl's leading apologists, Richard Meran Barsam: 'The achievements of Riefenstahl's large crew are unimpressive.'

This is not true of shot composition, as there is almost no moment even in the most prosaic of shots when the aesthetic principles of the Greeks are not being obeyed. But before crediting Riefenstahl with this it would be as well to remember the overall aesthetic atmosphere that was being created around the party, which is documented in *Art in the Third Reich*

\*The number claimed varies. Richard Meran Barsam in *Filmguide to Triumph of the Will* (Indiana University Press, 1975) gives in one place 19 cameramen, 19 assistants, plus one aerial and an unnumbered group from the newsreels; elsewhere he gives 36 cameramen and assistants, 9 aerial photographers, 17 newsreel crew, 12 newsreel crew from Tobis (for sound). Riefenstahl has given 16 cameramen using thirty cameras (not impossible, since assistants would normally be given the opportunity to use second cameras). I have taken the named cameramen from the credit list in Barsam, plus Riefenstahl's number of newsreel men (29), plus one (not 9!) aerial photographer to give a total of 49. Clearly more cameras could have been at work. It does not matter much except that the confusion is typical.



Left: the banners of Nuremberg. Above: Leni Riefenstahl with a cameraman in brownshirt uniform; Hitler on the platform.



by Berthold Hinz.\* As aesthetic practitioners, her cameramen could have been expected, even without her explicit instruction, to frame deliberately left or right or, above all, to look constantly upwards, not just at the Führer but at the entire cast of characters including bit players and extras, especially if those extras are in uniform.

One of the central problems of fascism, as both Hinz and Susan Sontag† have pointed out, is that its aesthetics offer no discontinuity in the aesthetic development of our culture. Fascist aesthetics are a product of Western aesthetics. This is why the Riefenstahl industry can be so enamoured of the form of *Triumph of the Will* while desperately trying to disavow its content. That cannot be done; and consideration of the low angle, the most prevalent compositional technique in the film, neatly illustrates why not.

The original technique of low angle viewpoint 'was used in the Renaissance in drawing classical statuary. Since these statues were usually mounted on pedestals it was inevitable that they were seen and drawn from below ... Renaissance worship of the sublime added to this naturalistic effect' (Berthold Hinz). The viewpoint places the observer level with the feet of the statue; which is, as Hinz points out, 'an accurate reflection of fascist reality in the sense that a kick in the face is a constant threat.' Thus a pre-fascist artistic convention, with specific connotations, is taken up by the fascists and those connotations are thereby extended. The result is not an automatic revulsion in the non-fascist viewer; on the contrary, the shared aesthetic effectively co-opts the viewer. Inevitably, given our aesthetic history, the low angle dominates *Triumph of the Will*.

It is not an inconsistency that I can both deny Riefenstahl's real responsibility for the camerawork yet claim that the film reflects her oneness with fascist aesthetics. This is because, as Susan Sontag has documented, Riefenstahl's preoccupation with such iconography and themes continues unabated into the 70s. (In 1973, in an American documentary, one is astounded to hear her describe the extras in one of her films as 'coming from the past,' 'from the Gothic ... West Gothic, and they have decadent faces; long, small, and they have big ... heads.')

Fascist aesthetics, in Sontag's words, 'flow from and justify a preoccupation with situations of control, submissive behaviour, and extravagant effort; the turning of people into things; the multiplication of things and groupings of people/things around an all powerful hypnotic leader figure or force. Fascist art glorifies surrender, it exalts mindlessness.' The later part of this quotation covers the dominant iconography of *Triumph of the Will*—the singularity of Hitler and the mass of the crowd. The ideology of this opposition is transparent.



Leni Riefenstahl with Hitler.

In Riefenstahl's own contemporary (ghosted) description of the film it is, 'The Führer above all! Above the tremendous symphony of crowds, marching columns, meetings, commemorations, marches and congresses.' How she achieves this opposition is a second and more significant reason, beyond a simplistic view of content, why the Riefenstahl industry cannot avoid or separate out in some way the inherent fascism of the film.

The sequence in the tent 'city of soldiers and workers'—a city of mass ablutions, mass consumption of sausage and black bread, the labour of logging and the horseplay of wrestling and blanket-tossing—is the film's most perfect illustration of Sontag's 'situations of control, submissive behaviour and extravagant effort.' This is the nearest the film comes to looking behind the scenes; but Riefenstahl is not interested in documenting the organisation of the Rally. She leaves the beauties of the city and the formal surface of ceremony and meeting to concentrate on such things as muscular young men standing on each other's backs and racing, like the charioteers in *Ben-Hur*. This is not without significance. The regret expressed by the Riefenstahl industry that 'there is a nearly ineradicable relationship between Leni Riefenstahl and Nazism' would be, in the light of these choices, absurd were it not so distasteful.

This tent city sequence also contains further evidence of the limitations of the filming. The camera pans resolutely away from some wrestling action to frame a line of tents. Obviously the crew then spotted the wrestling and repositioned to film it, using reflectors crudely to light the boys. This crudeness is of a piece with the other lighting in the film. It is claimed that Riefenstahl was pioneering a number of location lighting techniques; the results of these experiments are bravely included in the final cut. But throwing a searchlight across part of a crowd is simple, ineffective and ultimately not very adventurous. Those night shots of the band outside Hitler's

hotel are for the most part just well enough exposed for one to see the badness of the post-synching, which it should be said is no worse than its time. Inside the Luitpold Hall a better job was done—but that auditorium can be considered as a studio, and one which had been available for planning for at least seven months.

More astonishing, in view of the sixty-one hours of material, is the fact that there are a few out of focus shots in the film and that these are of the Führer. In other words, not one of all her cameras could give Riefenstahl a good shot of Hitler at a couple of crucial moments. The most crucial is when the plane lands in the first sequence. The shot begins with two out of focus Lufthansa stewards running for the door; Hitler steps out and the camera does not focus up until Goebbels steps out after him. It is not until five shots after his first appearance that we see him in focus. Riefenstahl has never disputed Siegfried Kracauer's reading of the significance of her opening sequence, that it is a god descending. The whole thing would fall apart if Hitler is at the end of it all discovered already on the ground. Hence, soft shots.

Apart from being forced to use out of focus shots, Riefenstahl was also required to reshoot some other material. This is revealed by Albert Speer in his memoirs, *Inside the Third Reich*. The introductory speech of Hess and the statements of Rosenberg, Frank and Streicher were filmed, he says, later in Berlin. Speer claims, with that self-serving naivety all surviving Nazis seem to adopt, that he was upset by Hess' ability to duplicate on the duplicate set in Berlin, in the absence of the Führer, exactly the same passion he had called up in Nuremberg. But, he says, 'Frau Riefenstahl on the other hand thought the acted scenes better than the original presentation.'

For Riefenstahl this revelation was a blow, because she has always claimed that despite the fact she is a great artist she did nothing more at Nuremberg than film the event. 'Not a single scene is staged. Everything is genuine ... It is

\*Hinz, *Art in the Third Reich*, trans. Kimber & Kimber. (Pantheon, New York, 1979).

†Sontag, 'Fascinating Fascism', *New York Review of Books*, 1974. Reprinted in *Movies and Methods*, ed. Nichols. (University of California Press, 1976).





*Horseplay in the tent 'city of soldiers and workers'.*

history, pure history.' What is crucially at stake here is her credibility with the Riefenstahl industry, who have for two decades dutifully reported the 'actual' nature of her coverage. First she simply denied Speer's stories, claiming that he was confused. Then in the mid-70s she started to claim that she in fact only re-filmed Streicher, because she forgot him, or because of a camera fault.

To forget Streicher, publisher of *Der Stürmer*, the most rabidly anti-semitic of the Nazi leaders, would of course be considered no sin. But if she did forget him it was because his obsession with racial purity was not the first order of business at the 6th Congress. It is anyway unlikely that she did any such thing. Streicher was Gauleiter of the Gau of Franconia, in which Nuremberg lies. He was credited by her with co-operation during the making of the film, including the provision of crew accommodation. More than that, in a legal dispute with her co-writer and director on *The Blue Light*, her first independent feature released in 1932, she invoked Streicher's aid. The man in dispute with her was Bela Balazs. He was a Jew.

Riefenstahl is helped by the simple fact that none of her credulous interlocutors ever closely examines the film. There are two shots of Hess and they do not mesh together; in one the serried ranks of men behind Hess suggest that the lectern was facing Hitler; in the other the background is light with a flagpole and the lectern seems to be facing the hall. This speech of Hess has the worst sync, apart from the music, in the film. In fact there are seven patterns of light on the backgrounds of the twelve speakers in this sequence. Two of those mentioned by Speer as having been reshot in Berlin share exactly the same background as two others not mentioned. Four have completely individual backgrounds, and of these again two are mentioned by Speer and two are not. It is probably safe to assume that only the four who share one pattern of background lighting and are not mentioned by Speer are in the Luitpold Hall. For

the rest it must be an open question, Riefenstahl's protests notwithstanding.

Since the filming was neither effective nor totally 'actual', Riefenstahl's skill as an editor becomes a main plank of the Riefenstahl industry's platform. Let us turn to that claim, beginning with the structure of the film as a whole.

At 107 minutes, given the limited subject matter, the film is inordinately long and crushingly repetitive; marching columns and marches, meetings and congresses and commemorations. Riefenstahl offers an account of her restructuring of the chronology of the congress which suggests she was simply

### **'A poet among hacks'— Richard Meran Barsam**

concerned with creating 'hills and valleys'. Her notion of what these might be is attenuated. Take the great march past, described even by Barsam as 'lengthy'. It lasts eighteen minutes and four seconds. But it is preceded by a sequence—the Ceremony of the Fallen—which lasts eleven minutes and seventeen seconds, well over half of which is taken up with marching about; and it is followed by the closing sequence of the film in the Luitpold Hall, which begins with the lengthy marching in of the war banners (and concludes with Hitler's fifth speech of the film). Her notion of a valley includes one over ten minutes across in which a nicely shot tour of Nuremberg in the early morning is followed by the goings-on in Tent City and concludes with badly cut coverage of men, women and children in folk costume progressing, some of them eventually being presented to Hitler.

The film's reputation as a work of immense power depends—it seems to me, crucially depends—on those public domain prints which are of little more

than an hour's duration. The shorter (sixty-minute) cut, concentrating as it does on the more effective big scenes, is an infinitely better made film than Riefenstahl's. But it is not Riefenstahl's film. Her work reveals a failure of film-making judgment (a failure, in part, repeated in her next two documentaries *Fest der Volkes* and *Fest der Schönheit*): she is as in love with her own material as the average film student. Thus it was that *Triumph of the Will* was far too long to serve any useful purpose, except to influence those already committed to Nazism. And in 1934/35 there was a pressing reason why such a film might be needed.

The structure of the film is obviously crudely to contrast formality and (comparative) informality, night and day, march and speech, to have 'hills and valleys'. But that is not the prime organising requirement. Neither is the theme that 'Hitler has come from the sky to kindle ancient Nuremberg with the primal Teutonic fire, to liberate the energy and spirit of the German people' (Ken Kelman, *Film Culture*, 1973). This sort of statement of the obvious does not explain why the film is the way it is and why what is said, is said. These questions can only be answered by looking closely at the actual political message of the film in its time. The Rally was held seventy days after the Röhm Putsch. The film was cut and released as the purge of Left SA men continued throughout Germany. For Riefenstahl to maintain her status as an 'artist', it is necessary for her constantly to claim that she had no idea about the internal situation of the party. (Although what Herbert Seehofer, the name credited on the film as party propaganda consultant, talked to her about must thereby remain unclear.) She says in interviews, 'I have not one moment thought of Röhm,' and 'I told Hitler that I don't know what is SA and what is SS.'

It is important to establish what terms Riefenstahl claims she agreed with Hitler for the making of the film. 'Nobody of the party, including Goebbels, including Hitler, has seen one metre.' She was allowed to shoot, edit and première the picture with no interference (except of course that the film was registered with the censorship apparatus before public screening). She claims in her interviews her complete independence of the party. Taking her at her word, the careful and coherent political structure of the film becomes a puzzle. It is of course possible for her to have arrived at this political structure by accident.

The first line propaganda importance of the 6th Annual Party Congress and, therefore, of *Triumph of the Will* remains in the account both the event and the film offer of the aftermath of the Röhm Putsch. A contemporary American diarist quoted in Hinton's *The Films of Leni Riefenstahl* describes the scene at the Ceremony for the Fallen thus: 'Hitler faced his SA stormtroopers today for the first time since the bloody purge ... There was considerable tension in the stadium and I noticed that Hitler's own bodyguard was drawn up in front of him separating him from the mass of brownshirts.'

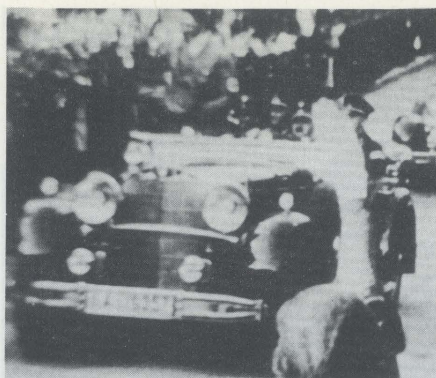


Hitler did not rise to the occasion: 'Men of the SA and the SS. A few months ago, a black shadow spread over the movement. Neither the SA, nor any other institution of the party, has anything to do with this shadow ... And if anyone sins against the spirit of the SA, this will not break the SA but only those who dare to sin against them. Only a lunatic or a deliberate liar could think that I, or anybody, would ever dissolve what we ourselves have built up over many long years.' The eyewitness reports that the SA seemed unimpressed. Riefenstahl helps along this rather poor performance of the big lie in action by emphasising the dazzling spectacle of the setting. One must of course sympathise with Hitler's rhetorical problem on this occasion. Even as he spoke thousands of lower level SA cadres were being dismissed from the party and some arrested. Between two and four hundred had already been killed.

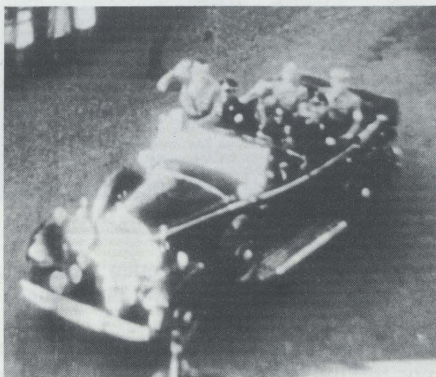
Yet Riefenstahl knew nothing of this. That Hitler is seen in the film more in brown shirt SA uniform than any other is a fact of history. That she chooses to begin the speeches in the Congress—for nobody was ordering her—with Wagner reading Hitler's proclamation that 'no revolution could last for ever without leading to total anarchy' was an accident. It was a political accident and purely artistic that every speaker in the film but three and Hitler on each occasion that he speaks in some way or another deals with the threat from the left posed by the SA. Rosenberg speaks of today's 'special youth' (the SA was dominated by 20-year-olds as well as schoolteachers and civil servants) who are 'tempestuously charging forward' and who 'will one day be called upon to continue the efforts begun in the stormy years of the 1918 Munich revolution.' (My italics.) 'One day' the social revolution then implied will continue—but not now! The speeches of Todt, the chief autobahn engineer, Reinhardt, head of the speech training school of the party, Darre, the agriculture minister and Hierl of the Reich Labour Service all emphasise the progress that has been made in reviving work. Ley, the leader of the Reich Labour Front, sums it up: 'One thought alone must dominate all our work: to make the German worker an upstanding proud citizen enjoying equal rights with the rest of the nation.' This social trust dominates Riefenstahl's selection to the point where other topics on the party agenda are almost forgotten.

Apart from this sequence of speakers, only on one occasion do we see a gathering being addressed without Hitler. Lutze, one of the least effective of Nazi speakers, the man who had succeeded Röhm, is heard to utter these (immortal?) words: 'Comrades, many of you who are here tonight know me from those first years of our movement when I marched with you in your rank and file as an SA man. I am as much of an SA man now as I was then. We SA men know only one thing: fidelity to and fighting for the Führer.'

Neither the import of the message nor the quality of the shots suggests a reason for the inclusion of this sequence. Had we not Riefenstahl's denial, we could



'Hitler drives into Nuremberg ... in a Mercedes with a magic windscreen.'



perhaps understand it. In the last speech of the film, Hitler returns to the task: 'In the past our adversaries, through suppression and persecution, have cleaned the party from time to time of the rubbish that began to appear. Today we must do the mustering out and discarding of what have proven to be bad ...'

Riefenstahl's first defence to this case that the film has an obvious and dominant political line is to claim she knew nothing because she was out of Germany over the summer of 1934—as if radio and newspapers were yet to be invented. 'I was at this time in Spain ... look, in the whole film as Hitler is speaking to the SA he mentions in one moment the Röhm affair ... Hitler mentions this because it was coming out from this and so he mentions this. But I have not thought to make this ... it is only separate. Even Hitler has spoken only a very few words about this.' (*Film Culture* interview, 1973.)

The film, as we have seen, is structured around Hitler's immediate need to contain the numerically powerful but leaderless SA. In so far as the SA were contained and in so far as *Triumph of the Will* operated in that containment, thus far it was successful as propaganda. Let Riefenstahl know nothing of Röhm. It is but a small matter compared to other things she also claims no knowledge of: 'I don't want to be linked with concentration camps. I have never seen them. I had nothing to do with them.'

Normative editing rules are a contract, as it were, between film-maker and audience as to the nature and quality of 'the reality' on offer. Yet, with forty-nine or more cameras, Riefenstahl breaks every editing rule in the book. She hacks pan to pan, she reverses action (crosses the line), she jump cuts sync. action. But

most significant of all is the fact that all those cameras yield a scant half-dozen matched cuts in the entire film (and most of those are false—in the blanket-tossing sequence). The matched cut is, in a multi-camera shoot at least, a sort of guarantee on the contract implied by the editing. Instead Riefenstahl uses the cutaway to cutaway style of Ruttmann's *Berlin: die Symphonie einer Grossstadt*; a style invented not so that the normative rules of narrative editing might be suspended but rather that they might be by-passed when the footage was non-repetitive 'actuality'.

The cutaway to cutaway technique destroys the possibility of the viewer reading off the relationship of any shot to any other shot except where an obvious interruption takes place. The result is that 'the concrete "reality" of Nuremberg becomes tenuous', as even the Riefenstahl industry has noticed. Of course one knows that, at ninety feet a minute, on portable cameras long takes were then difficult. And one also knows that all film editing requires rearrangement and abridgement. What Riefenstahl does is to carry on that process with such disregard for the maintenance of continuity of time and place that she reaches an extreme.

Take the opening of the film: Hitler's plane—a plane we never see Hitler in—descends through heavy cloud and at the same time casts a sharp edged shadow on the ground below, a meteorological situation not often encountered. All normative readings of narrative suggest that the shadowed columns are marching to meet the plane. They never get there. The crowd at the airfield is not at the airfield: this crowd is shown standing on walls and in front of trees. There are no walls or trees at the airfield, as is revealed in the widest of the establishing shots of the plane. This shot is itself a little strange, since it shows a crowd, oddly thin (about six files of thirty people in

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**'Her brilliant control  
of montage'—  
Richard Meran Barsam**

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each), standing before the equally oddly deserted plane. Then there is a wide shot of the plane surrounded by officials and cars. But the plane itself is a little strange, for it appears to have quite different markings on either side of its tail. I would suggest that Riefenstahl was totally wrong-footed at the airport (the out of focus shot of Hitler comes here and is a further indication); and that on the evidence of the film the arrival was restaged with a small crowd of extras and the sequence constructed with material shot elsewhere.

Hitler then drives into Nuremberg. He does this in a Mercedes with a magic windscreen, which in some shots is up and in others laid flat on the bonnet. In fact this drive is constructed from two drives, the second (with the windscreen down) being used later in the film as



well. It is lucky he spent most of the Congress in SA uniform. As with the windscreen, so with Hitler's hair, which is untidy and combed in different close-up shots. Also those shots in which he is haloed or 'marked' with light seem to be later in the day than either his arrival at the airfield or the hotel would allow, so there must be a possibility that another drive or drives is involved in the cutting. During the drive he enters a tunnel of quite different proportions from the one he exits. Close-ups at the hotel could not have been taken as he arrived because the camera needed for them is not in the establishing shot. (The foreshortening of these close-ups in which Hitler is seen surrounded by officials is not sufficient to suggest the use of an ultra-long [say 200mm] lens which could have been mounted out of the range of the other cameras.)

This construction of action, with cut-aways hung out on it like washing on a line, is a constant in the film. In the final parade, such are the changes among the leaders standing before the Mercedes Hitler is using as a reviewing stand, that one has no idea from the film how many parades there actually were. That Riefenstahl can do this with the material is a measure not of her editing skill, for one can see her doing it quite plainly, but of the limited variety of coverage she had. Bits from any one scene can, more or less, fit into any other scene, save only that night and day, interior and exterior are not cross-cut. That a certain rhythm is achieved is because the events, as she records them, all took place at about the same pace—a medium march or a twenty mile an hour car ride.

Given that Hitler, 'the figure who literally dominates', does so mainly in single shots or small tight group shots, it is actually possible for the viewer to ask (especially in the light of the added soundtrack with its sub-Wagnerian bands, laughs, guffaws and [perhaps—why not?] augmented applause and 'Sieg Heils') whether Hitler was really at Nuremberg for the 6th *Parteitag*. Only in the Ceremony of the Fallen, the youth rally and the final entry into the Luitpold Hall do we see Hitler with substantial numbers of people. Elsewhere the crowds are average to thin or he is so far away that it could be an extra impersonating him. This absurdist result is what all the little lies of the editing finally add up to. Far from being 'purely historical. I [Riefenstahl] state precisely: it is film *vérité*. It reflects the truth that was then, in 1934, history'; far from coming 'to surpass *Potemkin* as the ultimate cinema propaganda ... for one essential reason: *Triumph* is a true documentary, completely made up of "actual" footage—the ultimate in incontrovertible credibility' (Ken Kelman, *Film Culture*, 1973); far from all this, *Triumph of the Will*, ultimately because of its cutting, achieves the near impossible. So disoriented, so fictionalised, is the editing that it calls into question quite often material the veracity of which is assured us by other sources, other witnesses.

Goebbels 'was not satisfied with having 52 per cent of the nation and terrorising

the other 48 per cent. We want the people as the people, not only passively but actively.' The way to do this was, in part, to seize control of the means of media production, but not overtly to compromise that production. 'We National Socialists do not place any particular value on our SA marching across the stage or screen ... The National Socialist government has never asked that SA films should be made. On the contrary—it sees the danger in a surplus of them.' Thus Goebbels in 1933 (quoted in *Film Propaganda*, by Richard Taylor). Hitler, however, was not so sure.

Goebbels favoured the 'independence' of ideologically safe film-makers. Through the Reichsfilmkammer the industry had been purged of Jewish and other alien elements. It was safe to leave the remainder 'free'. This system applied not only to film-makers. 'Artists were not necessarily politically committed—many artists successful under national socialism would later cite this point to exonerate themselves' (Berthold Hinz). Which

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**'The film genius lives within you and you have raised the cinema up to the heights where it usually does not ascend'**  
—Jean Cocteau

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is exactly what Riefenstahl has done. So determined was Goebbels to leave a simulacrum of 'independence' that even the newsreel companies, the regime's major visual propaganda medium, were taken over via a front organisation and only openly nationalised in 1940.

Riefenstahl has been embarrassed by the title on the release print of *Triumph of the Will* from UFA that the producer of the film was the party's own film section. She claims it is a lie, and cites the independent nature of her Olympic film production company to prove the independence of this earlier work. But the reality of film-making independence under National Socialism is a fiction. It really does not matter who commissioned, produced or financed the film. One way or another the Nazis ran the German film industry.

All of Riefenstahl's 'spiel' falls into place. Of course it was Hitler who asked her to make the film, since Goebbels, the apostle of indirect propaganda, would be against it. There is then the supposed hostility Goebbels had for her. There is no evidence of animosity beyond perhaps the sexism of the Nazis and a real belief that she was doing counter-productive work. In the event, Goebbels was right. The film was not well received. She claims that one of her demands from Hitler was that she never be asked to do a film for the Government again. Why would they want another? Hitler had disagreed with Goebbels, but *Triumph of the Will* had made Goebbels' point.

Goebbels was certainly friendly enough to give the film the 1935 National Film

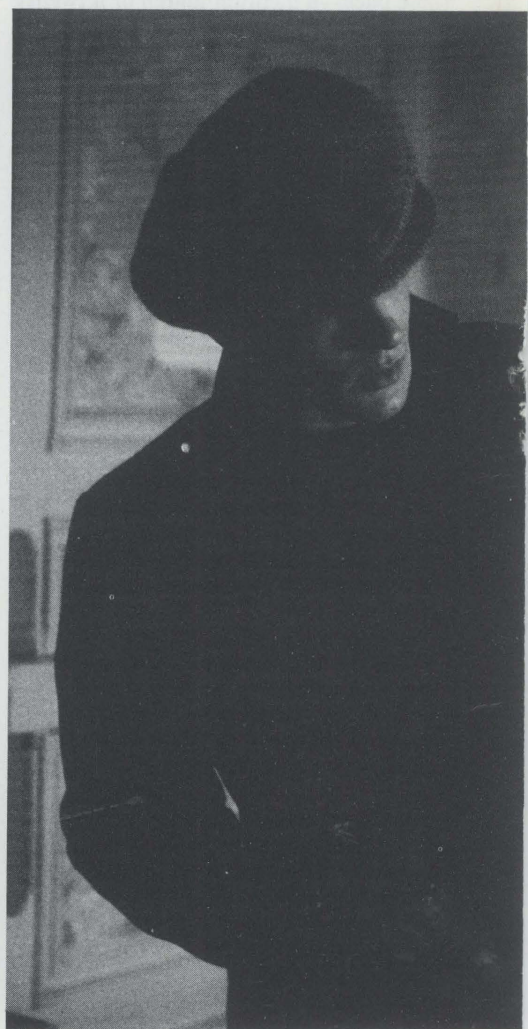
Prize: she denies it to a tribunal in 1947. And as late as 1972 she is still denying that she ever received official recognition from the Nazis. 'I don't want to have any kind of official honour because I need my time ... I want to be 100 per cent independent.'

After *Triumph of the Will*, the main thrust of the Nazi propaganda machine in the area of actuality film was to exploit the audience's naive trust and belief in the newsreel; the sort of trust in the credibility of film nowhere more touchingly and lingeringly exhibited than by the Riefenstahl industry. 'The paintings of German fascism no longer reflected reality but presented it in such a way that it paralysed consciousness,' says Berthold Hinz. No more paralysed collection of consciousnesses can be found than those which have for twenty years or so assiduously devoted themselves to Riefenstahl. I can sympathise with those smitten by the charming persona of this still beautiful actress, with her lisp and little girl voice creating a picture not of a worldly wise political woman in her thirties, a dancer film star and film director in the Weimar Republic, but rather the innocent, uncorrupted Fraulein who never went to see Mr Hitler but she took her mother and father. But, without any caveats or saving pleas to art, to deal with this film is unavoidably to deal with Nazism. Art has nothing to do with it. 'It (the art of the Third Reich) was evasive, in that it made no reference whatever to what we regard as the salient features of the regime, and it was corroborative, in that it went along with what people most wanted to be told. As to the true nature of the times, it tells us nothing. As to the true nature of art, it tells us even less.' This stands for *Triumph of the Will*, perfectly. It is gross, sycophantic, mendacious and masochistic. It works only because of Speer's spectacle.

The West has too much enjoyed, not to say luxuriated in the spectacle of the dehumanised mass—the Trooping of the Colour, 42nd Street chorines, the sea of revolutionaries before the Winter Palace, the race for the Cimarron Strip. If we have paid a price for this taste, then it was a part of the price we paid to the fascists. For too long has Riefenstahl traded on critics' amnesia and their addiction to spectacle. Hers was no ancient hippodrome, no Monument Valley harmlessly to fascinate the film-maker. The parades of such fantasies, the pornography of such a notion of human perfection cost millions of dead. To be asked to forget them for any work of art is preposterous. To be asked to forget them for this piece of frantic yet turgidly crude technique is particularly unacceptable. ■

Speeches at the Nuremberg Congress are quoted from *Filmguide to Triumph of the Will*, by Richard Meran Barsam (Indiana University Press, 1975). Richard Taylor in *Film Propaganda* (1979) warns that official Congress texts differ from the speeches recorded in the film, and offers some alternative translations. Quotations from Leni Riefenstahl are taken from interviews in *Cahiers du Cinéma* (1965), *Film Culture* (1973), and interviews quoted in *The Films of Leni Riefenstahl* by David B. Hinton (1978) and *Leni Riefenstahl—Fallen Film Goddess* by Glenn B. Infield (1976).



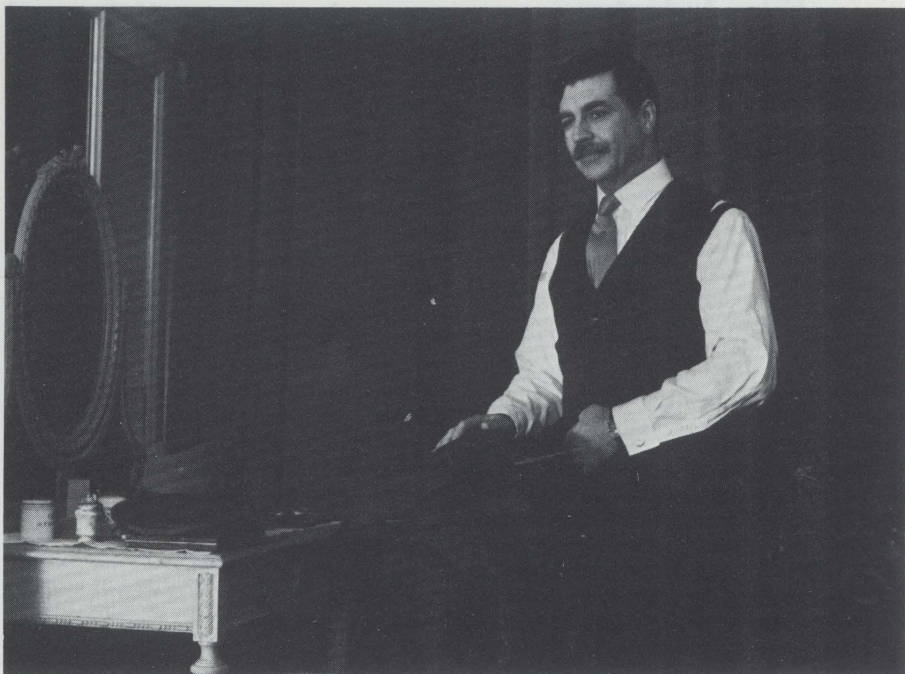
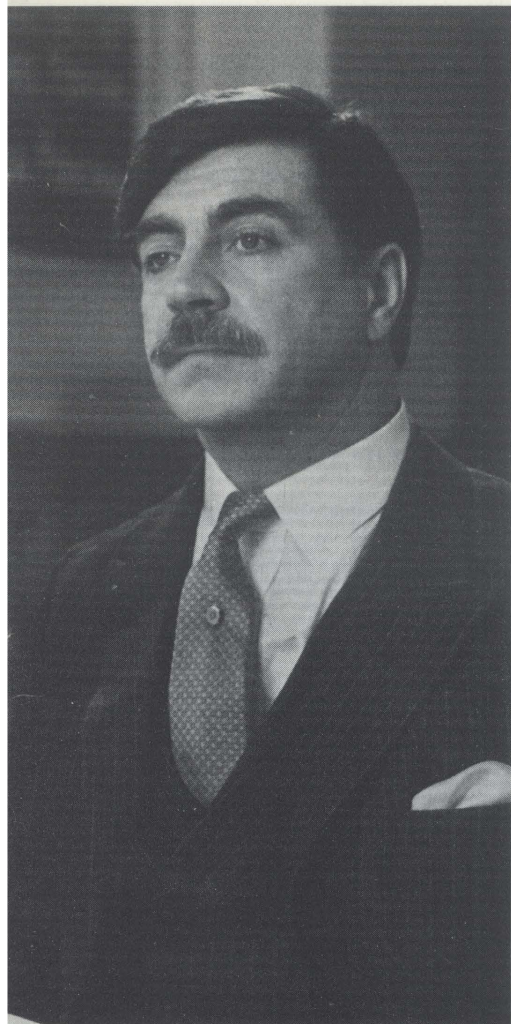




# Quartet

Financed from French sources and Britain's National Film Development Fund, the James Ivory-Ismail Merchant adaptation of Jean Rhys' novel *Quartet*, scripted by Ruth Prawer Jhabvala and photographed by Pierre Lhomme, completed location shooting in Paris at the end of last year. Filmed in both French and English versions, *Quartet*, which treats its author's experiences in Paris in the 1920s and her association with Ford Madox Ford, stars Isabelle Adjani, as Marya Zelli, and Alan Bates and Maggie Smith, as the benevolent Heidlers. The film will be distributed in Britain by 20th Century Fox.

*Top left: director James Ivory and Maggie Smith; Ivory, producer Ismail Merchant and goat; left: Maggie Smith, Bernice Stegers and Alan Bates; bottom left and centre: Isabelle Adjani; below: Anthony Higgins; bottom right: Alan Bates.*





IN JULY 1941, the shape of British propaganda changed radically with the appointment of Brendan Bracken as Minister of Information. Since the outbreak of war, ministers had come and gone (three in all), leaving confusion and contradiction behind them. Bracken was the only Minister of Information who knew from the inside how a newspaper worked—he had owned the *Financial News* and *Investor's Chronicle* and been co-owner with Sir Henry Strakosch of the *Economist*. His friendship with Beaverbrook and with Churchill, for whom he had been PPS, allowed him to argue on level terms with more senior colleagues.

Exhortations to the public to do its duty in the national interest had clearly not been working. Communication between government and the people, Bracken held, was not just a one-way process. In April 1942, in a secret memorandum to the War Cabinet, he wrote: 'Public feeling and the public's reaction to the war cannot any longer be taken for granted. To study them, to assess them and to adjust our publicity to meet them is now a much more important concern of the Government than it was two years ago . . . There must be more explanation: not only about the armed forces and the war situation, but also about production, labour, wartime restrictions and the big problems that affect the life of everyone today. When the public is bewildered by something new, a failure to explain means the risk of driving a wedge between the Government and the public and this fact must be given full weight when security risks suggest the withholding of information. We must stop appealing to the public or lecturing at it. One makes it furious, the other resentful. General appeals to the public or to particular sections should not be made. There are too many people working to the limit of their capacity or unable to do so for reasons beyond their control.'

## The MOI and the Film Industry

Bracken's proposals were accepted by the Cabinet without modification. Of the three main media—the press, broadcasting and the cinema—it was the last that presented the Ministry with its greatest problems. Two years earlier, in 1940, the Select Committee on National Expenditure had effectively prevented the MOI from involving itself in film production when its Thirteenth Report examined the record of the Ministry's Films Division. The Committee drew attention to the length of time required to make a film and the probability that its message would be out of date before it reached the screen; it also commented on the high element of financial risk in feature production. Both dangers had materialised during the MOI's first effort to sponsor a feature: the project, which related to France, had to be abandoned after France surrendered. The Select Committee recommended that the propaganda and financial elements in feature produc-

During the Second World War, the feature film played a key role in the British government's propaganda campaign. In 1942, Brendan Bracken wanted a film made about the Army; in 1944, *The Way Ahead* opened

# THE WAY

## CASE HISTORY OF A PROPAGANDA FILM BY



Before: (from left) Burden, Donald, Huntley, Laurie, Holloway, Hanley.

tion should be kept separate, and that there were other ways to use film than by sponsoring features. The Films Division, it proposed, could submit projects to commercial producers, or might influence films undertaken on a producer's initiative. In either case, it could help with production facilities. In this way, propaganda purposes could be served without much expense, and without direct interference or control by the MOI.

The Films Division of the MOI agreed that it should not in future spend public money on feature production, but disagreed about precisely how it should liaise with commercial producers. The Select Committee favoured asking producers to allocate a definite proportion of their output to films of distinct national value. Films Division argued that it was the best judge of what was in the national interest, and that it should act as a critical clearing-house for ideas and retain the right to suggest subjects to producers. There was also the question of the use of Service facilities for films. The Select Committee and Films Division both argued that producers should not be charged. The Treasury took a sterner view: not only were producers still to be charged the additional costs of providing the services of the armed forces, but subjects prepared under the aegis of the MOI were to be sold for a

profit, either for a flat fee, a percentage of profits, or both.

By November 1942, Jack Beddington, Director of Films Division, was able to report to the Treasury that in principle scripts developed by the MOI would be paid for, though profit sharing was felt to be impracticable. A start had been made with the sale to Two Cities Films, for £250, of the rights to the script of *White Ants*. In the same memorandum, Beddington outlined the mechanics of liaison with the film industry: film writers and directors were members of the Ministry's Ideas Committee, and he himself attended meetings of the recently reconstituted British Film Producers' Association. In fact, the Ideas Committee was the fount of feature film production ideology. Here subjects and themes were discussed and checked against the MOI's information and propaganda policy. Film-makers such as Michael Powell, Leslie Howard (until he was shot down by the Nazis), Michael Balcon and Charles Frend sat down with civil servants for the informal pre-censorship of projects.

After a film's theme emerged from this committee, there were three main ways in which political and commercial interests could be accommodated. One was to let the company make the film according to its own judgment, while discreetly



in London. The story of the conception, making and reception of the film shows what happened in this particular case and offers some general insights into the problems of using features as propaganda.

# AHEAD

VINCENT PORTER AND CHAIM LITEWSKI



After: Laurie, Hanley, Burden, Donald, Holloway.

subsidising the production by providing cut-price Service facilities. A second was for the MOI to develop and sell a complete script. A third and more thorough way to marry politics and commerce was for the MOI to put together a more substantial package: a script, Service facilities, and the loan of key personnel.

This last was the procedure adopted for *The Way Ahead*, which was made by Two Cities Films from a treatment by Major David Niven of the Rifle Brigade and Captain Carol Reed, Lieutenant Eric Ambler and Private Peter Ustinov, all of the Army Kinematograph Service. Two Cities paid £250 for the treatment and undertook to prepare a complete shooting script which would be vetted by the MOI and the War Office, as would the choice of producer and the final cut. Two Cities also assigned to the Government one-third of all UK profits, after allowing the distributors a 17½ per cent commission and after deducting the print, advertising and audited production costs. From the MOI's point of view, it seemed to have struck a good bargain. It had tight control of the project, with no investment of public money, and stood to profit from any box-office success. Tactically speaking, Films Division had pulled off a coup. Whether their close involvement was strategically worthwhile in the long term remains more open to doubt.

## 'A really good film about the Army'

By mid-1942, Brendan Bracken saw a need for a film about the Army. His monthly Home Intelligence Reports to the Cabinet on the state of public morale showed a mood of frustration. There was a loss of interest in the war and in war news; there were grievances about disparities between servicemen's pay and that of civilian war workers. Discontent about pay, particularly among servicemen's dependents, was confirmed in a secret memorandum from the War Office to the MOI, dated 30 June, reflecting reports from commanders in the field. There was a feeling that a lack of a proper spirit of patriotism among some sections of the female population was keeping men back from dangerous duty.

Bracken realised that the cinema was the appropriate medium for reaching this target group. As Louis Moss and Kathleen Box confirmed in their Social Survey Report on the Cinema Audience (1943): 'Many of the groups with a high average cinema attendance, the younger age groups and the lower economic groups, read newspapers less . . . Large groups of the population are relatively better represented in the cinema audience than they are in the public reached by the

other visual publicity media such as newspapers and books.' Furthermore, among those under 40 who went to the cinema once a week or more, women outnumbered men by between five and seven per cent. The question remained, however, what sort of film was wanted?

Autumn 1942 saw the release of *In Which We Serve*, directed by Noël Coward for Two Cities, and Bracken at once realised that he wanted a film which would do for the Army what this one did for the Navy. (His judgment was sound, for *In Which We Serve* became the box-office success of 1943.) On 9 October 1942, he wrote to Coward: 'I hope you will consider very carefully my suggestion that you should make a film about the Army. I have never seen a really good film about the Army, and I am sure you could make one which would be as rousing a success as *In Which We Serve*.'

Noël Coward declined the offer: he felt he did not have the same contact with the Army. But Bracken's initiative was not lost, for within a month Del Giudice, Managing Director of Two Cities, was writing to Films Division to propose a film to be scripted by Eric Ambler and directed by Carol Reed which would be 'of real entertainment value but treated very carefully and with great sincerity, and would be welcome as helping army "morale" by showing all that the nation owes to the British Army and giving it its rightful place in the minds of the English-speaking peoples.'

Bracken had also been active in developing his project. He knew that to succeed a film needed a star. According to a respected agent, quoted by Guy Morgan in *Red Roses Every Night*, there were at that time exactly four and a half British stars: Vivien Leigh, Laurence Olivier, Robert Donat, Leslie Howard and David Niven. Niven, the half star, had returned from Hollywood at the start of the war to volunteer for active service. He too was concerned about the state of Army morale and suggested to his superiors that it was time a feature was made about the Army. Within a few weeks, Major Niven was asked by the Adjutant-General's office to look into the possibilities of producing a film. By the end of November, Niven, in addition to his normal Army duties, had held discussions with the War Office and the film industry and reached conclusions which he conveyed to Jack Beddington: '(1) The film must have one object only, and that is to make everyone who sees it say either, "There, that's what our Bert is doing. Isn't it wonderful," or "See, we old-timers started something in the last lot," or again, in an American audience, "The British Army is OK." (2) In order to accomplish the above, the film must be on a really important scale and must certainly not be just a small propaganda short. (3) The movie-going public, which in this country, the Dominions and the United States numbers nearly 200,000,000, after three years of war can smell pure propaganda a mile off. (4) Therefore the film must be of first class entertainment value with the benefit to Army prestige coming as a natural result of the "story" . . . (9) The first essential is to find a synopsis of the



"story" (not "story" in the sense of plots with heroes and villains of course, but a proper continuity of events leading towards a definite cinematic objective).'

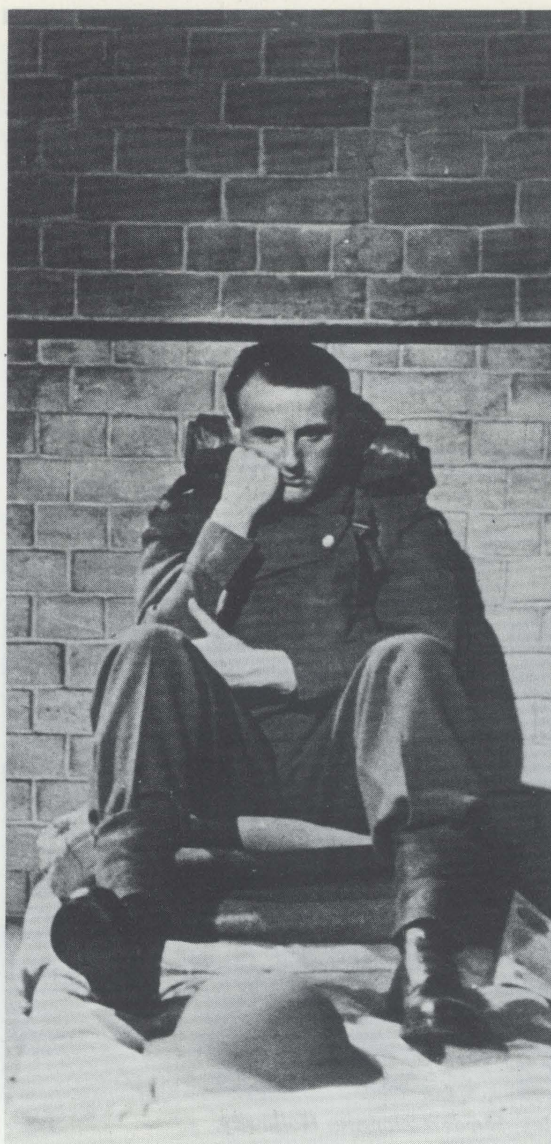
He proposed that he, Eric Linklater, Carol Reed and Eric Ambler should be given a month's special duty leave to prepare such a story. By New Year 1943, the Army had agreed to let Niven, Reed and Ambler work on the story. They were joined by private Peter Ustinov, who was ostensibly acting as Niven's batman. They locked themselves in a room at a Mayfair hotel, and by early March the Army Council and its public relations division had accepted the treatment and proposed that it be sold to a producer on condition that Ambler and Ustinov be employed as writers and Reed as director and the working producer be acceptable to the MOI and the War Office. Niven was to be available if needed, but the decision to employ him as star of the film was a commercial rather than a political or military one. The distinction is important, for Niven's presence as star played a key role in shaping the film.

## What price David Niven?

Once *Two Cities* had bought the treatment and agreed to develop a shooting script, money had to be raised. J. Arthur Rank's General Film Distributors, who were to release the film in the United Kingdom, were adamant. They would not put up a penny of production finance unless Niven starred. Unfortunately, Niven was under contract to Samuel Goldwyn, and could only star if Goldwyn loaned him to *Two Cities*. The British courts had already upheld the harsh terms of the Hollywood studio contract when Warner Bros. won its 1937 action against Bette Davis, whose counsel had unsuccessfully argued that her contract was one of slavery rather than of service.

At this stage in his career, Niven's track record was limited. Goldwyn needed to be convinced that his future earning power would not be jeopardised. In addition, he wanted an option to buy the film's US distribution rights. Despite its involvement with the project, the MOI would not endorse Del Giudice's claim to Goldwyn that the British Government was to help *Two Cities* with facilities in return for a percentage of profits. On 1 June 1943, Beddington wrote to Del Giudice: 'I must make it clear that neither this Department or any other ... can concern itself directly with negotiations of this kind. You must make the best bargain you can with Mr Goldwyn. If the bargain involves distribution for the film in the USA it will need to be approved by the Minister under Clause 13 of the contract.' On 5 June, the War Office concurred: 'There can be no question but that the Ministry of Information attitude ... is the right one. Niven is a civilian and his contract with Samuel Goldwyn is nothing whatsoever to do with the War Office.'

Del Giudice was being driven into a corner. He finally managed to negotiate a draft agreement with Goldwyn. In return for Niven's release, no other artist's name would appear before the



Left: Hugh Burden in barracks.  
Above: encounter in Africa: Peter Ustinov, David Niven, Leslie Dwyer, William Hartnell.  
Right: cookhouse chores.  
Far right: the writers, Eric Ambler, Peter Ustinov.

film's title or be more than half the size of Niven's. For a mere £50,000, Goldwyn was to distribute the film throughout the world for seven years, except in British territories, Australasia and, of course, enemy occupied territories. Furthermore, Goldwyn would have the right to change the title, re-edit the film and make whatever other changes he deemed desirable.

The MOI and the War Office were horrified. They could see their carefully negotiated control fast disappearing, but somehow an agreement had to be reached. They even considered trying to bluff Goldwyn by threatening to recall Niven to Army service and ordering him to act in the film, but were afraid Goldwyn might call the bluff. Finally, the MOI accepted terms under which Goldwyn agreed to exercise his rights to recut and retitle only if the changes were agreed by the Ministry, and Del Giudice undertook to pay them £4,500 of the £50,000 he would receive if Goldwyn exercised his option to take up the world rights.

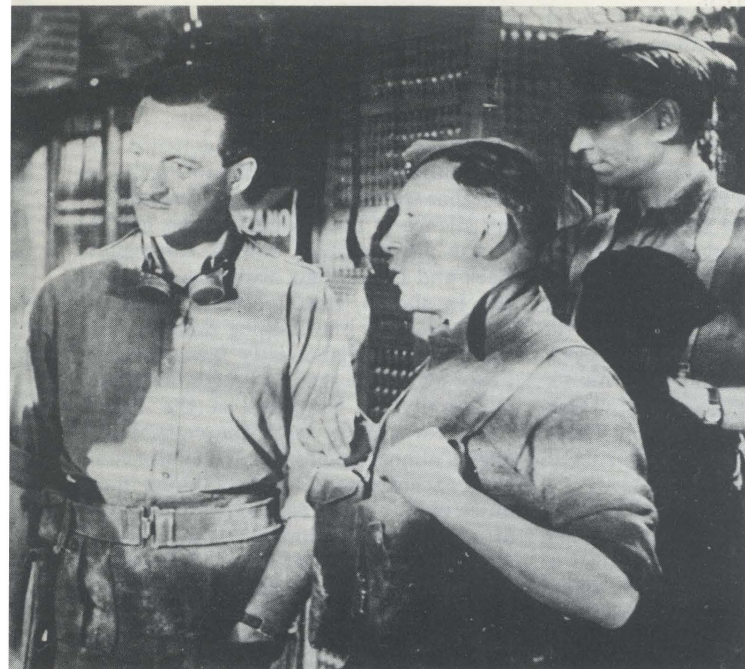
## Total Morale

In preparing their treatment for *The Way Ahead*, the writers drew heavily on *The New Lot*, a 40-minute Army indoctrination film, made under the supervision of military psychiatrists, on which Ambler, Reed and Ustinov had all

worked. *The New Lot* was conceived as a means of using humour to bridge the gap between civilian and service life. Some seven men from all walks of life were brought together, grumbling and protesting, and welded into a fighting unit. In the process, the recruits in the film—and the audience watching it—were made to see the necessity of doing something absurd to achieve military unity. Although the film was apparently still shown to Army recruits until a few years ago, it seems there is no longer a print of *The New Lot* in existence.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the film's success, the military psychologists were not satisfied. They wanted large cinema audiences to see civilians being trained as soldiers, and this desire merged with other needs for a propaganda film about the Army. *The New Lot* clearly influenced the narrative line of *The Way Ahead*—the formation of a fighting unit which sees action in North Africa. But meanwhile the entry of the United States into the war had led to increased influence for American psychological studies. The Home Intelligence Reports coming into the MOI were mirrored by similar civilian attitudes in America. A Harvard seminar in autumn 1942, reported in the *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, revealed morale deficiencies and pointed to the need to reinforce certain attitudes: that





all were making an equal economic sacrifice; that everyone had a useful role; that a sense of involvement and sacrifice was matched by adequate training and equipment; that they had confidence in their leaders' fairness, ability, kinship with the common man and readiness to listen to constructive criticism; and that there would be solidarity within each working unit.

Total War, the psychologists said, demanded Total Morale. In *Character and Personality*, Fletcher McCord argued, unconsciously echoing Bracken, that movies should serve simply as entertainment, as emotional food. The propagandist should not create bogeymen, but realistically present the facts, including the unpleasant ones. Ego functions—which related to the individual *in* and *with* the group—were strengthened by providing specific group goals, presented in positive terms and as far as possible personalised. The conflicting demands of the Superego—which in terms of morale led to rigid, categorical behaviour, no matter what the individual's experience—needed to be modified by detecting and releasing guilt. In particular, the demand for equality of treatment was liable if not met to lead to hatred of authority and failure to co-operate.

The theorising of the psychologists was not lost on the Government propagandists. An unsigned and undated note on

the official file is worth quoting at length since it elaborates so closely the strategy that was to be adopted in *The Way Ahead*. 'Morale is a frame of mind: it is the will to win and the capacity to endure. In the group it arises from effective leadership, from a clear understanding of the aims of the nation at war and unity with those aims, and a knowledge of our competence to achieve them. In the individual morale depends on trust in officers, the tolerant affection of comrades and a conviction of personal worth and competence based on acknowledged military skill ... Discipline is accepted and becomes effective when the inevitable resentment over giving up individual liberty and privileges is neutralised by understanding of the necessity for discipline and respect for the leaders who administer it ... Morale and discipline are most easily developed and maintained in units whose officers recognise and accept their position as stern but benevolent "parental figures" ... Good officers are like good parents: they exercise a controlling (paternal) function and are at the same time solicitous for the welfare and comfort of their men—a maternal function.' Here, in a blunt and simple form, is the framework on which first *The New Lot* (which had no officer figure) and later *The Way Ahead* (which did have an officer figure) were built.

## THE THEME

'*The Way Ahead* is the story of the Tommy of Today. Your husband, my brother, their son, the man next door, the chap at the pub, the boy from the city ... A group of men join the Duke of Glendon's Light Infantry ... They find themselves part of a regiment whose battle honours sound like a long bugle call.

In Chelsea, London, wearing their scarlet coats with the big bright medals, are many of the grand old men of the Duke of Glendon's ... the D.O.G.s. as they call themselves. Each an old "salt-of-the-earth" regular, they have their doubts about "these civilians". Who ... of this pampered generation—the generation which went, totally unprepared, into 1939 as it were a dark tunnel—would be able to bear difficulty, danger, discomfort, as did the men of the old D.O.G.s.? What given amount of stress would these civilians' spirits bear, what burdens these untrained bodies? ...

'The honour of the Regiment, of the Army, is safe in the keeping of the ordinary man. He was a civilian, he became a Crusader. But that's not what he calls himself. As Tommy, we salute him, in this British film.'

—Eagle-Lion press synopsis



## The New Lot

The distributors' synopsis (see extracts above) reveals several points worth attention. First, the sequences in the home where the old soldiers of the regiment doubt the ability of the civilians to form a new army are clearly rooted in the diverse origins of the film and in a different psychological strategy. (In his memo of November 1942, David Niven specified that the film should have a single objective but in fact subtly rolled three aims into one—'That's what our Bert is doing'; 'We old-timers started something'; 'The British Army is OK.') The psychological thrust behind these sequences is also different—one of almost daring the 'new lot' to prove that they are as good as the 'old lot'. When viewed today, the sequences seem irrelevant, although they do bridge continuity gaps. An anonymous comment on the script, dated 29 June 1943, which stayed on the MOI file, says: 'The trick of continuity of using the Chelsea Pensioners in the pub all the way through is as old as Methusalem and, I think, much too "music hall" to come off on the screen.'

More significant is the absence from the synopsis of Niven's role as star, which was also a key ideological role in the operation of the film. Niven plays Jim



Perry, a garage mechanic who was in the Territorial Army before the war and who is commissioned after serving as a sergeant in France. The other seven men, Davenport, the pompous store manager; Parsons, his fawning assistant; Brewer, a stoker at the House of Commons; Luke, a Scottish farmer; Lloyd, a rent collector; Stainer, an up-market car salesman; and Beck, a travel agency clerk, are all conscripted privates. Using *The New Lot* as model, the seven become part of Lieutenant Perry's platoon. The film, in other words, maps a military hierarchy of an officer and his men on to a film industry hierarchy of movie star and character actors. This may be a commonplace of casting, but the significance is in the shifts in the developing relationship between Perry and his men and the ways in which these are linked with the screen personae of Niven and his fellow-actors. It reveals much about how the institution of cinema was used to manipulate the traditional order of society for propaganda purposes.

## Patriotism and Guilt

In December 1941, the National Service (No. 2) Act had provided for male call-up to be extended downwards to 18-year-olds and upwards to 51-year-olds. Unmarried women between twenty and thirty were also called up, and the 'block reservations' for reserved occupations were abolished. The Act gave Government a powerful weapon for planning which, as A.J.P. Taylor has noted, showed 'conscious recognition for the first time of the socialist doctrine that labour lay at the root of all wealth.' Many, however, found the change from a free market economy to a planned wartime economy difficult to bear. Few, except the managers, mourned the passing of the reserved occupations, and in *The Way Ahead* the audience is clearly meant to have little sympathy for Davenport, the store manager snifflily played by Raymond Huntley, who receives his own call-up papers immediately after showing scant sympathy for his newly conscripted assistant Parsons (Hugh Burden). More significant, as the Home Intelligence Reports showed, were the inequalities in pay between servicemen and civilians, and the sense of loss of individual liberty imposed by the call-up law. Patriotic loyalty was in conflict with the Superego principles of equality of treatment for all and the liberty of the individual. Often the result, as the psychologists had predicted, was moral indignation. It was this circle that the film had to square. *The Way Ahead* aimed to isolate and release, in a controlled way, the guilt locked in the Superego.

At first, the principle of equality is quietly but firmly established. Indeed, at a superficial glance, the film identifies with the working class against the establishment. After three shots of the 'old lot' in their Pensioners' uniforms, the camera tilts down Big Ben to discover Brewer (Stanley Holloway) stoking the House of Commons boilers and grumbling about the ways of MPs. Next come shots of

Beck (Leslie Dwyer) working in a travel agency and of Lloyd (James Donald) trying to collect rent from an irate tenant, who berates him for failing to maintain the property. Next Jim Perry is seen in the background serving at a petrol pump, while in the foreground a sports car driver complains, 'I've only had it six months and now they're talking about a war. I won't be able to get any spares... Foreign.' Not only is Perry one of 'us' who doesn't have an expensive foreign car. He is also identified as a patriotic employee rather than a selfish employer. As he hurries from work to put on his TA uniform, his employer grumbles: 'Look here, Jimmy, I was in the last lot, three years in the War Office. Nearly ruined me health.'

The action moves to 1941, a brief Hollywood-style montage establishing Perry's casual determination during army training. Social equality again asserts itself as Parsons and Davenport are called up; and during the train journey they meet first Brewer and Beck and then Luke (John Laurie), Lloyd and Stainer (Jimmy Hanley). At the station buffet, Stainer the car salesman is drinking heavily. Sergeant Fletcher (William Hartnell) pushes by and Stainer voices the suppressed thoughts of the politer recruits: 'Fancy putting decent civilians under blokes like that. You can't eat by numbers and sleep by numbers; have them yelling at you, day in and day out. By the left, quick pee!' Stainer's outburst demonstrates the civilian's rejection of military discipline, but is carefully constructed to undercut this by its assumption of class values and expression of tipsy vulgarity. Even Davenport has now accepted his new status ('It may be less embarrassing if we disregard any differences in status which may have existed in the store'). As the recruits dash across the platform to catch their train, we get a glimpse of Jim Perry, now in officer's uniform, hurriedly buying cigarettes.

From the start, therefore, those from the working class, including Perry, are shown as honest and hard-working. Those from rather higher up the social scale, such as Stainer and Lloyd, are suspect characters. Perry in these sequences is placed by Carol Reed on the edge of the narrative, and many of his lines of dialogue, such as those in the garage, are delivered literally at the edge of the frame. By the time the conscripts reach the barracks, however, the 'true' order of the film takes over. Perry is clearly superior, both in military rank and in star status, to the other seven.

Another Superego principle, that of individual freedom, which conflicts with collective discipline, is the dramatic focus of the film's first half. Perry is seen as the fair and sympathetic officer, while Fletcher stands for the discipline of square bashing. The conflict comes to a head when the platoon, led by Lloyd and Stainer, deliberately allow the enemy to 'kill' them during an exercise, with the result that their company lets down the whole battalion. The scene which follows, in which Perry dresses down his platoon, is the most powerful in the film, and it precisely involves the audience with the guilt of the men, who have thrown away

success in the manoeuvres so that they can get back to barracks early. Reed's *mise en scène* in this sequence demonstrates how subtly the audience is manipulated.

In the first shots of the sequence, the slow, purposeful movements of Perry and Fletcher contrast with the guilty, stationary silence of Lloyd and Stainer, leaders of the disobedience, and of Davenport, Beck and Luke, their acquiescent followers. In shot 5, the emotional space for Perry to start his dressing down is provided by the dishonestly fawning Luke ('Pity we didn't see it through, sir'), who is literally on the edge of the frame. Perry turns away from the camera and begins almost apologetically; as the camera concentrates on the listening men, much of his speech acquires the authority of a voice-over commentary. By shot 11 we get a brief MCS of Perry, followed by a MS of Davenport, Luke and Beck and a MS of Fletcher with his rifle, a visual correlative of the four companies of riflemen that defeated Napoleon's larger force (and by implication will defeat Hitler's). By shot 14, Perry walks towards the camera (we feel the weight of Niven's authority as a star) to take charge of the exorcism of lingering doubters in the audience. '... those are battle honours. You're allowed...'—the choice of word is important in ensuring that guilt expunges any trace residue of defiance—'You're allowed to wear that badge with those names on it.'

But the object of Perry's speech and the film-makers' craft is not to instil discipline by authority but by inducing guilt. And so, in his direct accusation, Perry looks out of the window. 'I know what went wrong today,' and he goes on to tell the platoon that he will not discipline them or report them to Captain Edwards. If they are lucky, they will have soldiers like Captain Edwards and Sergeant Fletcher to support them. In the meantime they can have their tea.

Perry's magnanimity came at a late stage in the film's preparation. In an earlier draft, in the Carol Reed papers at the British Film Institute, the speech was given to Fletcher and the Sergeant was to tell Perry of the men's misdemeanours. The shift, confirming Perry as the dominant force in the platoon, was supported by senior Army personnel from the Adjutant General downwards: they thought it was time British officers ceased to be played as chinless wonders. At the same time, the film-makers turned the emotional operation of the sequence in a more fruitful direction. At a crucial dramatic moment, the officer (and by extension any officer) is shown as both firm and humane. This is an authority which must command respect. And there is a further, unspoken benefit in the outcome of the scene. In deciding not to report the men to the company commander, Perry puts a small but significant space between himself and the higher military command. Such a space is important, because Perry and the men over whom he has established true authority have now to be reintegrated as a team.

The psychological operation of the film is completed in a civilian setting. The



# Lt Perry dresses down his platoon



1 L.S. Interior barracks. Lt Perry enters in background and walks slowly forward.



2 Two shot. Lloyd and Stainer watching him.

3 Perry advances towards camera followed by Sergeant Fletcher.

Fletcher: 'Tea's ready at the cookhouse, Sir. Shall I march 'em down, Sir?'

4 Three shot. Davenport, Beck and Luke.



5 L.S. Perry surrounded by the men, Luke on the right of frame.

Luke: 'Pity we didn't see it through, Sir. Eh?'

6 M.S. Perry. He turns away from the camera.

Perry: 'When this regiment was formed our country was doing pretty badly. Napoleon's armies were just across the Channel getting ready to invade us (he turns) and a great many people thought we were finished. We weren't. But not because we were lucky ...'

Still from the film *The Way Ahead* by courtesy of the Rank Organisation.



7 L.S. Taken over Perry's left shoulder of the platoon standing to attention.

'... When the first battalion of this regiment marched it was against Napoleon. Talavera, 1809. That was the first battle they made their own ...'

8 L.S. Perry in three-quarter profile. He turns away from camera.

'... And they marched 42 miles in 24 hours of a Spanish summer.'

9 M.S. Stainer, Lloyd and another soldier listening.

'... And every man jack of 'em carried a 60lb pack ...'



10 M.C.S. Lloyd.

'... Talavera. Look at your cap badges, you'll see the name on it ...'

11 M.C.S. Perry.

'... and the other battles too. Barresa, Sabugal ...'

12 M.S. Davenport, Luke and Beck.

'... At Sabugal together with four companies of riflemen ...'



13 M.S. Fletcher standing to attention, carrying rifle on his shoulder.

'... they defeated five times the number of Napoleon's troops.'

14 L.S. Barracks with the men listening. Perry in the middleground seen through the listening soldiers. Perry walks left and towards camera.

'... Salamanca, Orthez, Waterloo, Alma,

Sebastopol, Tel-el-Kebir, Mons, Ypres, Somme ...'



15 M.S. Perry turning towards camera and looking R to L and off screen.

'... those are battle honours. You're allowed to wear that badge with those names on it to show that you belong to the regiment that won them and that when the time comes, you'll do as well as they did. Last year that badge was in France ...'

16 M.S. Fletcher with his rifle.

'... this year in Libya ...'

17 Two shot. Lloyd and another soldier. 'It hasn't been disgraced yet ...'

18 M.S. Perry.

'... And now you're wearing it. (He turns away from camera and looks out of the barrack room window.) I know what went wrong today. (He turns to face his audience.) It so happens, Captain Edwards doesn't. You needn't worry. I'm not going to tell him; he's quite depressed enough as it is to think it was his company that let the whole battalion down. But I just want to tell you this. If you ever get near any real fighting—I don't suppose you'll ever be good enough, but if you do—'



19 L.S. Platoon listening.

'you'll find that you're looking to other men not to let you down ...'

20 M.S. Perry.

'If you're lucky, you'll have soldiers like Captain Edwards and Sergeant Fletcher to look to ...'

21 Three shot. Stainer, Lloyd and another soldier.

'If they're lucky ...'

22 M.S. Perry.

'they'll be with another company.'

23 L.S. Platoon in barracks. Perry walks out with his back to camera past the silent members of his platoon. As he leaves he says to Fletcher:

'All right Sergeant, they can have their tea.'



seven conscripts have been visiting Mrs Gillingham, a local lady who gives them tea and comforts. One day Perry turns up, and in having to talk together as civilised and essentially civilian human beings the officer and his men discover how much they have in common. Later, the men are given leave: a series of vignettes with wives and sweethearts precedes the second half of the film, which shows them embarking for North Africa, being torpedoed on the way and finally confronting the enemy.

In effect, these sequences bring together the civilian and predominantly female audience for the film and the military and predominantly male audience. The second half is dominated by traditional action sequences, but *The Way Ahead* has already been established as a war film of a very particular kind. Wives at home could understand the way in which their husbands could be brave—this transcending the fact that they were poorly paid, had lost individual freedom and were living in difficult conditions. Soldiers could understand how they might be brave themselves.

## Audience Reactions

*The Way Ahead* was given a sneak preview at the Majestic Theatre, Staines. According to the *Motion Picture Herald*, it enthralled the audience and provoked moved applause. Its West End opening on D Day, at the Odeon, Leicester Square, coincided with a feeling that the worst days of the war were over. The reviewers were enthusiastic. Jack Beddington wrote privately to Carol Reed: 'I think it is magnificent (and I'm not inclined to use such words). It is a beautiful portrait of the Army and of the ordinary citizen. I can find no words of criticism.' Beddington's enthusiasm was shared by senior officers in Combined Operations HQ and by the CIGS himself.

What, however, of the film's primary target audience? Some evidence of public reactions can be found in J. P. Mayer's *British Cinemas and Their Audiences*. Mayer had invited the readers of *Picturegoer* to describe their film likes and dislikes. Of some 150 replies, from an estimated circulation of one million, nearly three-quarters came from women and the same percentage from people under 25 years old. Most of the replies came from lower middle class readers. For a 24-year-old female typist at the Admiralty, films such as *The Way Ahead* proved that we could hold our own with American standards, while for a male engineering draughtsman of the same age, Hollywood couldn't touch British films such as *The Way Ahead*. More specific were a 21-year-old male art student from Ireland who liked the film for its humour, an 18-year-old textile worker who thought the stories and acting in films such as *The Way Ahead*, *The Gentle Sex* and *This Happy Breed* unique, and a 16-year-old girl clerk for whom 'The glimpses of home life were suply (sic) real without any decoration. Also each character was a true soldier in his own line of warfare. They also man-

aged to convey that "They also serve who only stand and wait."'

It seems clear from such comments that the film's implicit message and propagandist purpose were unquestioningly accepted by audiences, including the younger civilian women. But despite such a resounding success, it is necessary to be cautious before claiming that *The Way Ahead* achieved its propagandist intention. The time lag between the conception of the film and its cinema release was approximately eighteen months. During that time, the position had changed considerably. As early as 29 June 1943, an anonymous comment on the MOI file noted: 'I know it is too late to make any comments that can be at all useful, but I would like to record that I feel most strongly that this script is two years out of date. Our problem at the moment is very much more one of an over-trained Army, and we have passed the stage in the war when stories like *The Way Ahead* can help to explain the Army to us ...'

By mid-1944, when the film was released, the mood of the country was even further removed from that of the winter of 1942. Audience reactions indicate an unquestioning patriotism, at a time when there was no likelihood that a split could open between the Army and the people. The mood now was one of confidence in what the Allied Armies could achieve, and the film was speaking to a converted audience which did not doubt the need for conscription, but rather revelled in the Cockney humour of Stanley Holloway (*News of the World*), the excitement of the torpedoed ship (*News Chronicle*), the 'lifelike' characters. For the British audience, art was imitating life just as life itself was beginning to swing into top gear. It was not the same overseas.

## The film in America

Once the film was released, Del Giudice cabled Goldwyn asking him to relinquish the overseas rights in return for \$100,000. Goldwyn saw the film in New York on 30 June. He cabled back: 'I think it is a magnificent job and best picture you have produced—characterisations wonderful very touching and direction superb—I now appreciate reasons mentioned your cable for handling picture yourselves therefore I accept your offer of \$100,000.'

Although the British now had the world rights, there remained the problem of getting the film distributed in America. Brendan Bracken wrote to J Arthur Rank at the end of July suggesting that Spyros Skouras of Fox could easily be persuaded to handle it. But Skouras' distribution department were far from impressed. On 12 August, Skouras cabled Rank: '... Their reaction was strongly unfavourable. They are basically apprehensive about placing me bad light your eyes. They feel they cannot get width of distribution or worthwhile revenue because film is antedated and a little slow for American audiences—however will handle picture and every effort will

be made to give fullest service and attention possible.' Rank accepted the offer, and Niven wrote to Bracken on 18 August, thanking him for making it possible for *The Way Ahead* to be seen by the American public, who might like the British a little better for having done so. Whether these hopes were achieved is doubtful, the reservations of Fox's distribution department proving more accurate.

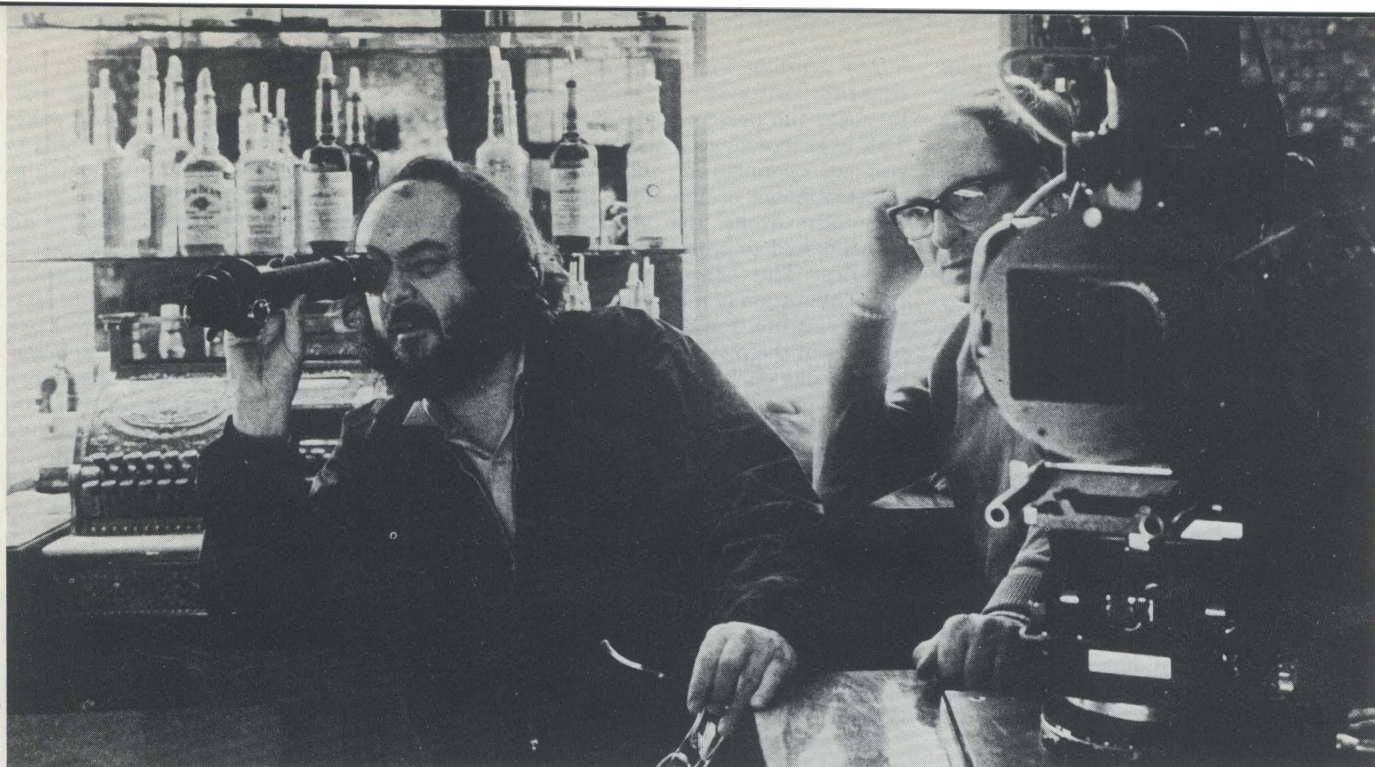
*The Way Ahead* opened at the Victoria Theatre, New York, in June 1945, a year after the London opening. It was eleven minutes shorter than the British version and had an introduction spoken by Quentin Reynolds. It stayed for only three weeks at the Victoria, by which time its receipts had fallen to a poor \$5,000. It was taken off and replaced by a reissue of *Call of the Wild*, which immediately picked up \$19,000 in its first week. Time and the American market were not on the side of the film. Although it was re-released on the West Coast in April 1946, again it did not do well. Jack D Grant summed it up in the *Hollywood Reporter*: 'When the fictional combat pictures dealing with World War II are assembled for judgment, *The Way Ahead* deserves high placement on the list ... Yet its release at the present time is unfortunate. Not enough of the public is likely to bother with seeing it, the apathy towards screen definitions of war being what it is currently.'

*The Way Ahead* cost £252,500 to produce, apart from hidden subsidies and facilities provided by the armed forces. By the end of 1945, it had recovered £183,700 from the British market, and its net revenue from foreign sales was a mere £12,200. Even if the film broke even when it was reissued, was the propaganda effort all worthwhile? In 1940, the Select Committee on National Expenditure pointed out the risk that a film's message would be out of date by the time it was released. This was certainly true of *The Way Ahead* in America; and even in Britain its success came about despite rather than because of its propagandist intent. Certainly the film gave pleasure to a number of people, who remember it with fond affection. It is a textbook example of a particular propaganda strategy in action, but a strategy never properly put to the test in the situation for which it was planned. In the event, the propagandists were pushing at an open door. ■

Sources for this article include War Cabinet, War Office and MOI files in the Public Record Office, especially CAB 98/28, WO 222/218 and INF I/224 and 284, and the Carol Reed papers deposited with the British Film Institute. Books consulted, apart from those referred to in the text, include *The People's War* by Angus Calder, *The Moon's a Balloon* by David Niven, and *Dear Me* by Peter Ustinov. The authors would also like to thank Eric Ambler, Thorold Dickinson, David Niven and Basil Wright for their time and assistance.

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# KUBRICK AND 'THE SHINING'

P. L. TITTERINGTON  
discusses the  
evolution of  
Kubrick's style  
and the language  
of his ideas

'Only a few film directors possess a conceptual talent—that is, a talent to crystallise every film they make into a cinematic concept ... It transcends the need to find a good subject, an absorbing story, or an extraordinary premise to build on. Essentially, it is the talent to construct a form that will exhibit the maker's vision in an unexpected way, often a way that seems to have been the only possible one when the film is finally finished. It is this conceptual talent that ... distinguishes Stanley Kubrick.'

The idea represented by these opening words of Alexander Walker's book on Kubrick seems to have played little part in the critical response to *The Shining*. David Robinson in *The Times*, while maintaining that Kubrick is one of the most gifted and ambitious film-makers in the world, talked of the 'sad mystery' of his latest film. Derek Malcolm felt that the Stephen King novel finally cheapens and distorts Kubrick's vision, and in the view of Alan Brien, Kubrick 'as so often' has become 'so infatuated with his own baroque visual effects as to neglect story or character.'

One can certainly feel sympathy for these reactions. Judged simply as a horror film, or even a thriller, *The Shining* appears an odd exercise. Any knowledge of King's novel creates an impression of remnants of the original surviving in what is otherwise a completely different kind of script, full of loose ends and with the story presented in little more than a schematic manner. There appears to be no serious attempt at tracing the psycho-

logical regression involved in Torrance's breakdown and in its later stages it seems to possess little psychological subtlety. A missing 25 minutes from the American version initially suggests that possibly drastic cutting has taken place, destroying crucial links in the stages both of the story and the breakdown. Judged as a thriller, it is at times extraordinarily slow. The signposting of developments long before they occur sacrifices suspense (even Kubrick's choice of poster demonstrates how much he is prepared to reveal in advance), and the building of tension is often deliberately short-circuited. And always there is the nagging awareness of the huge amounts of time and money, and all Kubrick's perfectionism, being devoted to this. David Robinson made the comment that Carpenter or De Palma could have come up with a passably comparable film in a couple of months, but a more disquieting comparison is that this is precisely the sort of story Corman used to make in a couple of days. The years of work seem

inexplicable. Great labour seems to have been devoted to an essentially trivial project that collapses under the weight of the attention it receives.

So blatant are many of these features on one's first impression that a single question comes to have precedence over all the others raised by the film: either something has gone very wrong indeed, or something very different from what one had expected is being attempted. A possibly typical first reaction is one of bafflement and disappointment; but within hours of the screening, it can happen that the sequences and the experiences begin to rearrange themselves and a completely different way of looking at the film starts to emerge.

It would appear to be no coincidence that first reactions to *The Shining* have much in common with those to *2001: A Space Odyssey*. This too opened to a baffled press, and it took a number of months before critics began to revise their original assessments. It is arguable that *2001* is still not properly understood, and the films Kubrick has made in the 70s, *A Clockwork Orange* and *Barry Lyndon*, have not helped, in any simple way, to clarify what new direction he was there attempting. But what seems clear is that *The Shining* has more in common with *2001* than any other film Kubrick has made, and the type of cinema being attempted by *2001* is crucial in understanding the new film. Most of the British critics have been unable to recognise any of the main ideas being explored in *The Shining*, the themes that cast light



on why the film has taken the particular form that it has. One of the very few reviews to give a hint as to what these might be was Nick Roddick's brief notice in the *Times Literary Supplement*. Roddick saw an unmistakable pattern: 'In 2001, Kubrick turned his actors into machines (or his machines into actors); in *A Clockwork Orange* he turned them into animals; and in *Barry Lyndon* they ended up somewhere between paintings and literary conceits. In *The Shining* he turns them into a house.'

The Overlook Hotel stands at the centre of *The Shining*, dwarfing the characters and their human tragedy, and possibly the principal cause of the events that occur. Throughout, the disproportion between the human action and the vast scale of the surroundings that contain it is a source of unease. And gradually, in the course of the film, the hotel becomes its central dominant image, one that is finally to be elaborated by myth and by associations drawn from the past history of the cinema. The image is that of the huge, empty, opulent hotel as an embodiment of a luxurious society and high civilisation, now deserted, and haunted by its dark and violent past that lives on to destroy those who come after. This central image that comes to unify all the film's many concerns draws on the associations of myth, and in particular the myth of the Labyrinth, with the Minotaur roaming its corridors. There are two principal mazes in *The Shining*, the garden maze outside the hotel where Torrance's wife Wendy (Shelley Duvall) and son Danny (Danny Lloyd) find their way to its centre (finding it 'beautiful') and where the possessed Torrance (Jack Nicholson) later pursues his son with an axe, and the maze of the hotel itself, its endless winding corridors explored by Kubrick's camera and its Steadicam system. As Nicholson becomes possessed, he becomes a Minotaur figure, lurking in the corridors of the labyrinth, half man, half beast, not horned but with an axe. These corridors are brilliantly lit, virtually without shadow, but in this film about 'coldness' and the losing of direction, they suggest a different kind of darkness.

The giant hotel acquires a very specific application in the film. One of the major themes of *The Shining* is America. As Altman used a single city as a microcosm in *Nashville*, and Coppola the behaviour of America in Vietnam in *Apocalypse Now*, so Kubrick presents his view of America through the image of the haunted luxury hotel. Indeed, of recent films, it is Coppola's that has most in common with *The Shining*, just as the latter in one sense can be seen as Kubrick's *Apocalypse Now*. In Coppola's film, through a style that attempts to combine both highly naturalistic and poetic modes of presentation, different images of American life are given surreal force by being isolated before a background of primeval jungle. What once was the genre of the 'condition of England' novel now finds its nearest contemporary counterpart in a number of ambitious films being made by some of the most experimentally minded of American directors.

*The Shining* works primarily through elements that evoke America's past history and the present state of its society. The huge opening helicopter shots suggest an openness of space before the claustrophobia of the story sets in. But they also evoke the vast spaces the pioneers had to cross in the founding of America. The helicopter shots suggest the exhilaration of a new found continent and a new life, the energy and hope and promise of the pioneering experience; but as we focus on Torrance's car far below in the forests and by the side of lakes, there is also the sense of the dwarfing of the pioneer, the danger of isolation and of being overwhelmed by the sheer size of the landscape. The dark side of the American experience is paramount in the film. The early exhilaration is soon lost and the contrast starkly made between the open spaces and the hotel surrounded by the freezing cold, the two faces of America, the early hopeful past marred by inhumanity and the luxurious present that has inherited that legacy.

As we follow the family up to the hotel to begin the winter caretaking job, Torrance talks about the wagon train that was stranded in the mountains over the winter and the pioneers resorting to cannibalism ('They had to,' says Torrance, 'to survive'). We hear that the Overlook Hotel has been built on an Indian burial ground, an evocation of the guilt associated with the American destruction of the Indians and their way of life, the violation of what they held sacred. The hotel manager describes the recent tragedy when a winter caretaker went mad and hacked his family to death in terms of 'cabin fever': the danger for early settlers of being cooped up together over winter in a log cabin. As Chaplin used the notion of 'cabin fever' as the source of comedy in *The Gold Rush*, so Kubrick presents an ironic modern equivalent, not in a cabin but in a hotel where it is not the confinement but the vast emptiness that is the threat. The film is full of such evocations, images and myths, many appearing in dark and perverted forms, virtually at a subliminal level. One person coming from the cinema, without knowing why, talked of being continually reminded of the story of George Washington's boyhood in the image of Torrance with his axe, and of a horrific parody of the Lincoln Memorial in the grotesque image of the dead Torrance at the end, frozen in death and staring before him with dead eyes.

In intimate relationship with these evocations and deeply buried associations with the American past, Kubrick presents a whole series of images drawn from the American present, and in particular those images most associated with it in the popular imagination: the family car outing, the game of ball, the nude pin-ups, the TV news, the job interview, the Independence Day celebrations. Insignia of different kinds are used on jerseys and T shirts: the American Eagle, 'Apollo USA', Mickey Mouse. *The Shining* incorporates all these images and references, but perhaps the most important are those connected with marriage and the family: the loss of contact between individuals, the suppressed frus-

tration, hostility and violence, in the early stages glimpsed in Torrance's irritability, sometimes flaring up into anger and abuse, in the latter stages turning to murderous aggression. By attempting to write a novel, Torrance seems to be desperately trying to give meaning to his life, after a past of routine jobs and heavy drinking. The whole relationship becomes a gruesome parody of a marriage, including its details of black humour (Torrance's 'Honey, I'm home' as the axe smashes through the door), the burlesque of the language of romantic love—'light of my life'—and the parody of the bedtime story as Torrance tries to force the door behind which his wife and son are hiding, with Torrance himself as the 'big bad wolf'.

The theme of America is however most pervasively present in the elaborate colour scheme of the film, using a red, white and blue base, the colours of the American flag. Flags appear in a number of early scenes, and their colours are gradually taken up into the colour pattern itself. (One can compare a similar use, relying on a discordant red-blue base, in Schrader's *American Gigolo*.) Red and blue are persistently present in many of the clothes of the film, especially Torrance's, with the white being picked up from either the snow background or the white light of the hotel. Often only two of the colours will be present at the beginning of a scene, allaying our recognition of the colour base, with the third being added in the course of the action: the blue and white of chef Hallorann's flat, with the red introduced by the telephone as he tries to contact the hotel; the red and white of the men's room, with the blue added by Torrance's jeans as he enters; the blue of the snow at night, punctuated by the white and flashing red of the snowmobile's lights.

There is also a pattern of alternating scenes, with those based on the predominant red, white and blue scheme preceding and following scenes making use of an entirely different colour base, such as green and light beige. In the course of the action, Kubrick and his cameraman John Alcott make dramatic use of the colour base by drawing out particular associations of individual colours in opposing directions. The red becomes progressively associated with violence and is often present in shots in the form of blood. The blue is increasingly associated with one of the film's central notions, the growing cold. The light comes to seem icy and blue-tinged, and is dramatically linked with the coldness in relationships and the retreat into the isolation of madness, in contrast with the more neutral earlier uses of white and blue of snow and sky (and opening credits). The red, white and blue colour base is introduced gradually, before dominating the film, and is set off against the earlier, comforting use of yellow, in the autumnal colours of nature, and the less comforting 'happy' associations of yellow, the surface cheerfulness of the American ideal, in the bright yellows of Torrance's car and his wife's pinafore.

At the centre of *The Shining*'s portrayal of the American experience, and a major theme in its own right, is the key





*The pioneer experience: Shelley Duvall, Danny Lloyd and Jack Nicholson.*

notion of communication. We are presented with a situation in human life where the entire middle range of what is customarily thought of as communication has broken down. Characters can no longer speak to one another. (The scene that becomes the epitome of this is the largely meaningless and clumsy conversation between Wendy and the radio operator, interrupted by the word 'over'.) Conversations between Torrance and his wife are fraught with hostility, and mother and son at the beginning have only limited contact. The isolation of figures runs throughout the film: the boy with the psychic powers with no one to play with, talking to an inner voice, 'Tony', and moving his finger like a ventriloquist's dummy, the parody of human communication that never breaks out of the circle of the self; the old chef Hallorann alone in his Miami room watching television; Torrance talking to 'Lloyd', a barman from his memory, and slipping into the isolation of madness. (In one long, sad scene, Torrance, feeling the onset of madness, tries to talk to his son but is finally reduced to holding him in his arms.) Much of the dialogue is deliberately banal, as in *2001*, and conveys little of meaning—in contrast to the single moment of lyrical beauty of Hallorann's 'those that *shine* can see'—and at the level of spoken communication the job interview, with its specious friendliness and assumed warmth, represents the degraded level to which people talking to one another has been reduced. Written communication has similarly broken down: Torrance's novel writing becomes a psychotic repetition of a single sentence, another closed circle in a film of closed circles.

Instead, in one of its most dramatic effects, *The Shining* confronts the two extremes on the scale of human communication across the total breakdown of the middle range—on the one hand, Torrance's isolation; on the other, in the psychic powers of the child, one of the

most subtle and intimate forms of communication imaginable. The 'shining' is a mode of awareness that bypasses language, establishes direct telepathic contact between minds, 'sees' past and future, and understands the nature of the present through graphic symbolic images, the most spectacular being the hotel corridors awash with blood. (The direct way the boy 'sees' images of past and future is conveyed in the unnerving scene where he plays with the knife and repeatedly mutters 'Redrum', the word 'murder' that he himself will write on a door, the image of which he saw in a mirror, and the letter order of which he repeats without understanding.)

At the level of the story, communication systems of all kinds are featured in the action and referred to in the dialogue. On the TV news, we hear of air, road and rail transport being blocked by snow; and the notion of 'coldness' bringing to a halt all forms of communication plays an important part in the film. In the story itself, this theme is kept before us in the central dramatic situation of the danger of becoming 'cut off' in the hotel, in both literal and deeper senses, and the fragility of lines of communication with the outside world. The telephone system fails early on; the radio is disabled by Torrance; finally the snowmobile is rendered useless. With all normal communications destroyed, the one remaining link is the old chef hundreds of miles away who shares with Danny the power of 'shining', and in his fear the boy attempts something it appears he has never done before: a telepathic message is sent over the huge distance that separates them. As one set of communications is destroyed, another is put in motion. With mother and son now trapped in the hotel with the insane Torrance, Hallorann begins the journey to reach them, through telephone, aeroplane, car and snowmobile, and it is his snowmobile that becomes the hope for mother and son after Hallorann himself has been murdered. The isolation of the

hotel becomes the analogue of Torrance's madness as the last links with outer reality are severed, the maze of its corridors the maze of his psychotic mind. Any outside contact becomes a threat, and Torrance kills Hallorann and then attempts to kill his son for bringing him there.

Total breakdown of communication, in each of its different senses, is the main dramatic thread in the film's complex themes, and the notion of 'communication' plays a role parallel to that of 'intelligence' in *2001*. By the end, sequences and images of total isolation predominate. As Wendy and Danny escape, their growing relationship the one thing of value to emerge from the tragedy, Torrance is left alone in the snow-covered maze and the maze of his own madness. His animal cries are one of the last sounds we take away from the film, and the shot of his dark, hunched figure shambling down the corridor of snow into the blinding light becomes an image of total desolation, and ultimately an image of death.

In presenting his main themes, Kubrick employs metaphors of different kinds and draws on the history of cinema. One of the most important metaphors is that of 'coldness', here playing a role parallel to the use of night and darkness in the classic *film noir*. (One can also compare Penn's metaphor of being 'under water' and the notion of drowning in the greatly underrated *Night Moves*.) 'Coldness' becomes the central metaphor for what Kubrick sees as happening to modern life—in the film, the coldness in the loveless marriage, the isolation of the self, the breaking down of the warmth of human contact. At the end, both traditions, that of 'night' in the *film noir* and 'coldness' as developed here, combine in the sequence of the hotel covered by snow with the coming of night. The contrast made is between Miami and Colorado: one where life continues under



the guise of normality in the warmth of the sun, the other where what lies beneath the surface is revealed by the cold (as Lawrence uses the symbolic geography of the 'snow world' of Switzerland in *Women in Love*). The energy previously celebrated in American cinema has become a source of fear, and in Kubrick's film, as in the films of Sam Fuller, that energy and extreme individualism is under threat of assuming psychotic forms. The last stages of *The Shining*, where that manic energy will finally be reduced to total inactivity, frozen in death, concern the ultimate end of the descent of that energy into madness as explored by Fuller.

This notion is also present in the film's use of the metaphor of the closed circle. The energy and seeming purposefulness of the forward-moving tracking shots is undermined by the final circular movement of the camera within the corridors. The different mazes in the film all carry the suggestion of the closed circle of much contemporary American life, a vicious circle with no way out, with the linked associations of the closed circle of the self in isolation and the closed circle of madness. (Another such circle is present in the film's very last image, the photograph with its hint of reincarnation.) The shot of Torrance looking down at the model maze suggests a mirror image: the maze without a reflection of that within, the maze of the human personality as formed in contemporary society (with the immediately following shot, of the real maze from above and the minute figures of his wife and son, becoming an image of their role in Torrance's tortuous obsessions).

Different notions of 'haunting' and 'possession' are being used in the film. Several traditions are invoked by Kubrick for understanding what is to happen in the hotel. Those already mentioned ('cabin fever' and the stranded wagon train) relate to the American past, but others involve the idea of a 'ghost ship', and Hallorann introduces the idea of past events leaving a trace behind. Torrance does not merely descend into madness; there is also the suggestion that he is 'possessed' by the evil that has occurred in the hotel. As in Polanski's *Repulsion*, there is the question as to whether all the events are in the main character's mind or not. Alan Brien saw as an 'unforgiveable confusion' events which occur that are not aspects of Torrance's madness, but Kubrick is making it plain that the house has powers of its own. (The barman, Lloyd, talks of 'orders from the house'.) The door of the mysterious room is unlocked; a ball rolls towards Danny from an empty corridor, an 'invitation to play' from the murdered girls; crucially, the store-room door is opened from the outside, releasing Torrance, after he has been speaking with the voice of the dead murderer who refers to 'myself and others'. Although the conventions of 'haunting' and 'possession' are invoked from within the traditions of the ghost story and the horror film, the hotel as an embodiment of an entire society allows them to acquire much deeper associations. They themselves become metaphors for the intimate

relationship between present life and the inherited past. In the way Torrance is literally taken over by the house, so that each is an aspect of the other, Kubrick has found means through which his ideas concerning the relationship between an individual and society can be directly presented in physical terms.

Within this framework of central metaphors, the notion of 'shining' also begins to take on different associations. In its primary sense, it is the form of subtle communication that the son shares with the old chef, the chief source of hope in the grim vision of the film, and the form of communication Torrance tries to destroy in the attempted murder of his son. (In his escape in the snow-covered maze, the slow retracing of his steps becomes one of the film's most significant actions.) The title of *The Shining* also, however, takes on an ironic implication in a film that is about the darkness within individual minds and the darkness within societies. But the most subtle association is felt as we gradually understand the role of 'shining' in the film as a whole. As a nightmare portrayal of the American experience, Torrance's withdrawal into madness is not hard to place, but what possibilities in human life are being portrayed in the young boy's power to 'shine', that type of communication that works beyond the bounds of language when language is in danger of breaking down?

Gradually, the boy's 'shining' becomes an extended metaphor for cinema itself, and an image of great beauty (just as the building of the cathedral spire in Golding's *The Spire* also at one level becomes an extended metaphor for the writing of a novel). Cinema in American society—and by implication, art generally—becomes the hope of communication, going beyond the compromised resources of a language which has too often been manipulated by a corrupt society for the spreading of lies (a reaction to language shared by many European writers in the first half of this century). The experience of cinema is literally a 'shining', the turning on of the light of the projector, the brilliance of the screen in the darkness. It becomes the image of the hope of communication and the metaphor for exactly the kind of cinema Kubrick has been trying to create since 2001.

*The Shining* seems to have the whole history of film behind it, and as with major figures in French cinema such as Godard and Resnais, so increasingly with Kubrick we are aware of a sensibility primarily formed by cinema. As in much modernist literature, echoes and allusions to previous works and to the development of the medium are put to use in *The Shining*. (It is especially in this connection that one senses how personal a film this is, and with its fears and nightmares very much those that particularly face an artist, one begins to feel that if the haunted hotel is an image of America, it is at the same time an image of Hollywood.) Behind the Overlook Hotel stands the Old Dark House of American horror films, including Hitchcock's *Psycho*. Similar conventions were drawn on in Resnais' *Provence*, and Resnais' own vast hotel of the memory

and imagination and its lovers in *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* plays its part in the presentation of the Overlook.

But the house that stands immediately behind the hotel is the Xanadu of *Citizen Kane*, for Welles an image of American society in its wealth and power and greed, its vast spaces separating its lovers, Kane and his mistress, and presiding over the destruction of their relationship. So strong are the associations between *Citizen Kane* and *The Shining* that actual lines of dialogue from the former almost audibly make themselves heard in Kubrick's film: as Hallorann takes the family round the food stores and a great catalogue of goods is built up, one can almost hear the line of commentary from *Kane*, 'the loot of the world', recalling another such catalogue. Many other conventions are being drawn on, including the figure of the axe murderer from horror films for the role of Torrance, as well as Quasimodo the hunchback, and in at least one instance the virtually direct 'quote' from Clouzot's *Les Diaboliques* of the dead body rising from the bath. It is almost as if Kubrick is presenting the horrors that Torrance experiences through the memories of horror films Torrance himself has seen. The very conventions in film that *The Shining* draws upon, and the type of film it itself appears to be, themselves become part of its presentation of America.

I have suggested that Kubrick is attempting something very difficult and extremely ambitious in *The Shining*, but what has been said so far only partially indicates what this is. One useful point of comparison can perhaps be found in modern experimental theatre. One of the major possibilities explored has been that of fusing the many types of theatre into a single overall form, as pre-eminently achieved by Shakespeare, and there have been particular attempts to combine the theatre of Brecht, with its emphasis on intellectual scrutiny and alienation techniques designed to prevent indiscriminate emotional identification, with the theatre of total, overwhelming subjective emotional involvement conceived by Artaud. A major example of such a combination was Peter Brook's 1964 production of Weiss' *Marat/Sade*, and much of Brook's work over the last ten years with his Paris theatre has been connected with this experiment.

Kubrick appears to be attempting something similar in film. As he contrasts the two extremes on the scale of communication as one of his principal themes in *The Shining*, so in the film's style (as in 2001) he tries to work simultaneously through the two extreme and opposing modes of awareness in art, with the traditional middle ground of plot and psychological presentation severely, and possibly dangerously, restricted. The latter, including the use of dialogue, has now been reduced to little more than a functional level. Instead, the new, evolving, complex style works through opposing features. On one hand, much of what Kubrick wants to express is carried by the images, created with great precision and conveying more and more of the film's information. (At the time of 2001,



Kubrick talked of trying to create a predominantly visual experience where language would play a strictly subordinate role.) This side of the style employs all the technical resources of modern cinema, an equivalent of what Artaud wanted for his theatre, and is meant to work directly upon us, principally in non-rational ways, creating its effect through a majestic interplay of sound and image. Its purpose is to bypass our conscious critical awareness, involving us intuitively and emotionally through images that largely work subliminally, but with great subtlety and precision. The other side of the style corresponds much more to what Brecht wanted for his theatre. The functional story and restricted dialogue, in relation to the experience conveyed by the images, cannot in themselves explain what we are seeing; and while the latter works on us subjectively, we are forced at the same time to question and critically assess the experience. As with Brook, Kubrick seeks to create works that will engage the whole of our nature in our response.

Considerations of the type of cinema Kubrick is trying to create cannot be separated from its main thematic concerns, in particular the themes connected with his view of human nature and what is happening to human life in the present period of history. When we look at his work as a whole, now including *The Shining*, one of the principal concerns to emerge is with the boundary conditions of what it is to be human, and those extreme situations that reveal the limitations, and hence define the nature, of our humanity. In *Spartacus*, in those sequences where one feels Kubrick has most control over the film he was hired to direct, this is seen in the training of men as gladiators, to become killing machines, and what can survive of a man's humanity in these circumstances. In *Lolita* it is explored through erotic obsession. In *Paths of Glory* the concern is presented through the horrifying experience of the First World War trenches, and the savage military orders that sacrifice lives for a futile objective and attempt to destroy any individual who disobeys. In *Dr Strangelove* the extreme experience is nuclear war; in *2001* the bounds of our humanity are defined on one hand through the encounter between man and the awesome technology of alien beings, and on the other through man's own technology, in particular his creation of an artificial mind. In *A Clockwork Orange* the bounds are defined by evil and a reversion to an almost animal, amoral mode of existence, with the question of free will a central issue; in *Barry Lyndon*, the limits of what an individual does with his life are charted against the events and society of the period, which condition much of what his life becomes (one suspects that this would similarly be a major concern of Kubrick's projected film about Napoleon). In *The Shining*, the determining conditions of human personality dictated by society, represented in *Barry Lyndon* by 18th century Europe, are explored in the context of 20th century America.

As with Fuller and Godard, journeys of dubious meaning and purpose play

important parts in this examination, the journeys themselves reflecting the extreme situations Kubrick seeks out. The whole of *Paths of Glory* has to do with a journey of several hundred yards that will cost thousands of lives. In *Dr Strangelove*, it is the journey of the bombers to destroy Moscow; in *2001*, the different stages of the ultimate journey, the voyage out across the universe in search of alien intelligence. There is the importance of the repeated journey in *A Clockwork Orange* and the picaresque of *Barry Lyndon*. In *The Shining* we are concerned with a journey's end, the point in human experience where all journeys come to a halt.



Torrance faces the baseball bat in his wife's trembling hand.

It is generally conceded that Kubrick has a grim view of modern life, but what has not been understood is the way this view has played a part in shaping the types of presentation he has developed, in areas that include story, treatment of character and the use of dialogue. In discussing his experimental work, Peter Brook has talked of 20th century man, through his 'social and spiritual upbringing', becoming 'emotionally constipated, temperamentally colourless, watered down in type and undramatic in manifestation.' Such a view inherently raises problems for dramatisation; and the style Kubrick is developing is intimately linked to his view of what is happening to human character.

In *2001* he presents an extremely subtle portrait of human nature and of what modern life is becoming, with trends more pronounced by being projected thirty years into the future, but this is only partly found in behaviour and dialogue. What man is and what man has become is largely presented through what man has made, a bold extension of the technique of presenting character through an individual's chosen possessions and surroundings. In *2001* an entire world of human technology is presented, in its character and actions—and in its malfunctions—an image of its maker. Man's artefacts become the embodiment—that can be filmed—of his values, his understanding, the way he sees himself and the world. The technique is already being explored in *Dr Strangelove*, with its nuclear paraphernalia and

huge war room; and by *A Clockwork Orange*, many aspects and values of contemporary life are being presented directly through architecture, design and the artefacts of pop art. In *The Shining* it is the hotel that becomes the 'artefact', through which the nature of modern life and the threats it poses is presented. Similarly, dialogue and acting styles assume unexpected forms. In *The Shining* and *2001* much of the dialogue is deliberately banal, carrying little of the main burden of what the films seek to convey, and suggesting rather a sadly impoverished way of life and understanding. *2001* suggests a superficially rational but emotionally restricted and almost dehumanised way of living, and the presentation of the Shelley Duvall character in the early stages of *The Shining* suggests not only simplicity but emptiness.

*The Shining* remains an extremely difficult film to assess. As with *2001*, how successful one judges any particular technique to be largely depends on one's judgment of the whole complex style. Kubrick's search is for a language of film that will convey complex ideas directly and the cinema he is trying to create is very much a cinema of ideas. 'Metaphysical' is an adjective that has often been used to describe his films, and justifiably. It captures something very important in the work—the philosophical nature of the ideas explored and the way they are presented. But in the area of style it suggests too 'one-dimensional' an approach. It does not begin to do justice to the interplay Kubrick has been able to achieve between the simplest naturalistic scene (the job interview in *The Shining*; Haywood Floyd's address to the moon station in *2001*) and the resonance such a scene takes on in relation to the deeper levels of the film.

Nevertheless, the problems facing such a style are many. The most obvious is perhaps that of accessibility. It is becoming commonplace that a first viewing of a new Kubrick film is likely to be a baffling experience (of recent work, probably the only exception is *A Clockwork Orange*, and that only because it can more easily be understood at a simple plot level alone). Time has to be allowed for one to become familiar with such a complex style, and one would suspect that Kubrick (who suggested that two viewings of *2001* would probably be necessary) would also want to say that a lot depends on what is communicated directly and subconsciously, even if the audience cannot articulate what they have seen.

In its own way, Kubrick's work since *2001* is every bit as difficult and as experimental as the cinema of Godard and Resnais, and yet created on huge budgets and meant for the widest possible distribution. *The Shining* is only properly understood when regarded in this way. Judgment at this stage still needs to be tentative, but it can be said that Kubrick is exploring an important direction open to modern cinema that no one else is investigating in quite the same way, and that success would lead to a significant extension of what film can do. In my judgment, he is succeeding. ■



# AT THE ACME

WE ARE IN PARADISE, a version of Los Angeles with book-stores on either side of the street. Is there any surer trace of William Faulkner's involvement on *The Big Sleep* than the dreamy city being so book-ended, or book-stores harbouring sharp honeys who can persuade the book-worm that he is on the verge of racy action whenever he browses among dry pages? *The Big Sleep* it calls itself, cautioning us to walk carefully, like people in an unfamiliar part of the dark. But the title is only the deep absorption in fancy that conjures up perfection, the daydreamer face-to-face with his obedient muse, no longer sure she is unreal—'Well, hello'.

This is 1944. Was there ever darker confidence in this century? The war was being won, and the comradeship of *Air Force* was still spared the proof of Europe's desolation and humanism's disaster. *The Big Sleep* is labelled *film noir*. We have heard all the talk about solitary men of honour who must go down mean streets. We know the intoxicating lament of wishful solitude, away from a nasty world: 'What did it matter where you lay once you were dead? In a dirty sump or in a marble tower on top of a high hill? You were dead, you were sleeping the big sleep, you were not bothered by things like that.\*' That is not quite despair or misery, not if Auschwitz is waiting to be opened. It is the self-pity of a dandy hero whose own fatalism shames the squalid, hurried world. It is a camp pessimism, another log on the fire in a winter that will be survived, what with the brandy, the books to read and the assurance that the daydream is as hungry but as undemanding as Dorothy Malone in *The Big Sleep*.

This paradox of exultation in bleakness is established very early in *The Big Sleep* as the film lays down its equation of sultry grace and off-hand honour. Raymond Chandler called General Sternwood an 'obviously dying man'. He had 'black eyes from which all fire had died long ago'; the face was 'a leaden mask, with the bloodless lips and the sharp nose and the sunken temples and the

\*Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep* (1939), penultimate sentence.

outward-turning ear-lobes of approaching dissolution.' But Charles Waldron, the actor in the film, looks magnificent. He may be shackled by invalidism, but his eyes blaze, his wits crackle and his head is rimmed with bright hair. The General cannot take brandy any longer. No matter, he is high on words, like all of *The Big Sleep*, a picture in love with unanswerable talk.

He is, if you like, a *Life* magazine William Faulkner, near death, noble and Nobel, resolute and unflinching, and talking in the way that interviewers expect of writers. Nearly all the General's talk is Chandler's, but Chandler had things in common with Faulkner: he was

## David Thomson

torn between being an English gentleman and being hard-boiled; he was battered about by booze, bad moods, women and writing—or by his own confusion over all those pleasures and traps. Still, on the movie of *The Big Sleep*, the two men proved capable of contributing to Howard Hawks' intense romance with style concealing itself in toughness—Hemingway's subterfuge of exploring naked grace while making all that fuss about being under pressure.

But they were different, too. *The Big Sleep* is as good as anything Chandler wrote, and it is mock tough, trash existentialism. As Leigh Brackett, one of the screenwriters on *The Big Sleep*, knew. 'By Chandler's own definition, Marlowe was a fantasy, not a real man in a real world. He existed only in the context of the Raymond Chandler world especially invented for him, with its stylised corruptions, its stylised characters who represented attitudes, not people, its stylised orchestrations of violence.' Faulkner did whatever he did on *The Big Sleep* script on a train back to Mississippi from Los Angeles. There was something in Faulkner that liked Hawks, that enjoyed the crossword puzzle contortions of writing movie scenes, and could give a shy, amused salute to Bogartism. But that

man also created the Compsons, the Snopes and Joe Christmas, characters too profuse and dark for any screen.

Marlowe, though, was written with movies in mind. No actor has failed in the part or looked uncomfortable; no one could fumble the terse eloquence, the tongue-in-cheek that talks hard and thinks soft, the grace of always inhabiting the margin of shadow and light, of having the supreme, romantic lack of attachment that can answer anyone back. But Marlowe is confined or imposed on at the start of *The Big Sleep*: Carmen uses him as a chair; General Sternwood crowds him with brandy and rhetoric; then Vivian tries to slide him up and down her silk lounging suit. He gets the better of her, but he has to stand there dripping with stale sweat and prodded by her fresh contempt. It's the closest he will ever come to the good-natured haplessness of Elliott Gould in *The Long Goodbye*.

But Bogart is neither serene nor amiable: the actor seems to nurse some of Chandler's regrets over life. He is only pleasant or glamorous when a superman, and in the opening sequences he has to endure several kinds of heat, not least Vivian's taunting that he hardly matches the legend he would himself like to believe in: 'So, you're a private detective. I didn't know they existed except in books, or else they were little greedy men snooping around hotels. My, you're a mess, aren't you?'

It's movie sex-talk, gilded now by our knowing that Bogart and Bacall were lovers at the time. Like Hawks, we want to believe in romantic conviction. Again, the dialogue comes largely from the novel, but Leigh Brackett and Hawks have expanded the scene, introduced a fresh element of sexual challenge and added several lines in the shooting that further the sublime and artificial verbal comedy of *The Big Sleep*. Best of all are the asides about wanting a drink, the 'Help yourself', the insolently perverse change of mind and the later banter that sounds so well but is only plausible if we see Marlowe and Vivian as a fond couple who make an aphrodisiac show of hostility in which she gives him the very lob he can smash: 'You go too far,

At the public library.



Bogart entering Geiger's shop.



'I had my horn-rimmed sun-glasses on.'





# BOOK SHOP

Marlowe.'—'Those are harsh words, Mrs Rutledge, especially when a man's leaving your bedroom.' This is divine chatter, and the trials and dangers that will soon arise must know what unassailable models of style and prowess they face. This Marlowe has no fear of the world when he can put it to sleep with a word.

Marlowe needs relaxation, fun and liberty after this taxing start. He finds it in three sequences that reveal *The Big Sleep* as Elysian, not sombre or morbid. They come from the book, and make only 4½ pages there. They are 6½ pages in the script, and 5½ minutes on screen. Novels usually shrink to make films; entire episodes are dropped. The original of *The Big Sleep* is about 70,000 words long; but the film has some scenes not in the book and others prolonged by the pleasures of innuendo and of minds stealthily trapping one another into dialogue. Chandler acknowledged that Hawks brought 'the gift of atmosphere and the requisite touch of hidden sadism' to a novel that was already loaded with teasing scorn.

In the first of the three scenes, Marlowe goes to the library for the research that will set up the next two scenes. Then he invades Geiger's book-store to learn more about the man blackmailing the Sternwoods. Unsuccessful there, he crosses the street to another, friendlier store where Dorothy Malone was waiting to have her story begun.

In the novel, the Hollywood public library is three lines: 'Half an hour of it made me need my lunch.' The movie cannot bring itself to be so dismissive: it has a set, shelves and volumes, crisp sound effects of pages turning and a tome thumping when Marlowe closes it. There is what the script calls 'the typical reading room, with the usual characters'. This was an age when the movies believed they understood what happened everywhere: we call it stereotyping now, but then it seemed like worldliness. The screen library has a librarian, a blonde in glasses with hair severely drawn back. She is pretty beneath that humourless front—in the 'usual' way of librarians—but she makes a nice target for Marlowe's remark that he collects blondes too when

she lets him know how far-fetched his research in bibliography seems.

That little extra reminds us of the asides in Vivian's bedroom, the playfulness of a comic dressed up as a private eye, and the Hawksian way in which plot momentum can adjust to these digressive niceties. What for Chandler was a genuine quest and mystery will turn in Hawks' hands into a self-sufficient, languid journey indifferent to destination, but sure that time and travelling allay the dark and stop sleep. The most camp element in *The Big Sleep* is the mounting calm with which the detective story becomes only a pretext for self-conscious artifice. This is a movie about actors dressing up, and pretending to inhabit certain genres and attitudes. And through this pretence, a new theme dawns in which Bogart's Marlowe emerges as a breathtakingly successful and happy man. He is not killed; he is alone but not lonely; he solves the riddle; and he will have Vivian on his arm as a sulky consort. Nothing disturbs Marlowe's sense of things, and so the picture is his paradise.

Marlowe saunters a few steps along a studio street before he comes to Geiger's store. In the book, the store is being minded by an ash blonde recognised with an early version of Mickey Spillane's narrative leer: 'She had long thighs and she walked with a certain something I hadn't often seen in bookstores.' What bliss if bookshops so regularly house a sexpot among the stacks. On the screen, the custodian is Sonia Darrin—one more example of Hawks' ability to find presence that lifts a small part out of obscurity or duty. She is raven-haired, abrasive and coarse, and that little bit more derisive because of the schtick Bogart adopts before he enters the store. Chandler is more discreet about this ploy. He has 'Agnes', the woman at Geiger's, ask 'Was it something?' before Marlowe tells us 'I had my horn-rimmed sun-glasses on. I put my voice high and let a bird twitter in it.'

That is so much less boisterous or noticeable than the way, on the street outside, Bogart goes fag and then kids himself about the game he's playing. The

ploy enlists us, and the film uses many tricks, other than Chandler's first-person narrative, to put us on Marlowe's side. But the revealed display of the film affords another perspective, so that Marlowe too can watch and enjoy himself. The acting has the wisdom of foresight that comes from seeing the rushes. That's one reason why the queer masquerade amuses him; the other is to reassure the audience that no offence is meant and no suggestion is being made about Bogart. The impersonation of homosexuality has something close to gaiety, but that's only because the film was made before anyone needed to respect or notice gay rights. In fact, the attitude towards gayness is no different from the notion of what a library is—full of usual and typical things, tidy with preconception. The gaiety and the delight come from the dexterity with which Bogart and the movie can play off the stooge idea.

Then, as if this were a fairy-story, needing three attempts at an answer, Marlowe has a third encounter with books and a woman. That suggests how far the pattern of three sequences is above and beyond plot. Marlowe could have gone straight from the Sternwood house to Geiger's home on Laurel Canyon Boulevard, or with just a brief call at the book-store to pick up the trail and introduce Agnes, who does figure later in the action. But the movie is inspired by this 'lull', as if to demonstrate the famous Hawks adage: 'You're just having fun. The main idea was to try and make every scene fun to look at.'

In the novel, Marlowe has to go at least another two blocks to find a second book-store. On screen, and on the Warners soundstage, the Acme Book Shop is across the street, a dozen steps away, in perfect diagonal line of sight. The sweet ideology of set-building makes Los Angeles so much cosier and tidier, and as Marlowe crosses the street there is an eloquent roll of thunder that is as proud a gesture towards real atmosphere as Hollywood ever allowed itself. Real vehicles ply this street, and on the far pavement Marlowe—or was it Bogart?—taps a fire hydrant with the flat of his hand. There is a sense of pleasure at order in that gesture, no matter how far

'You do sell books?'



'Real vehicles ply this street ...'



'The cardboard detail of illusion.'





# AT THE ACME BOOK SHOP



away it is. It suggests the high enjoyment of making films in this way, with a small patch of an LA boulevard alive and fraudulent in the lights, the arranged vehicles pulling up on the bare studio floor, and a dapper actor in a fedora reaching out his hand for the cardboard detail of illusion. You can touch this bravura bogusness—and let an actor's name mean a little more to him.

There are seventeen shots from Marlowe leaving Geiger's to his reluctant but necessary departure from the Acme. It is the passage I have been working towards, and it seems to me among the most beautiful and treacherous things in *The Big Sleep*. The ambivalence that the sequence arouses—for it is both transcendent and demented—is also at the heart of Hawks' character as an artist.

The first two shots have Marlowe coming out of Geiger's, taking off the dark glasses and putting them in his top pocket. Shot 2 is from the point of view of Geiger's, showing us the crossing of the street and that superstitious touching of the hydrant. It is a link, just a little more pronounced than it need be, and part of Hawks' steady accumulation of shots of Bogart walking—across streets and rooms. The link helps the illusion of real space, something that always tempts

MARLOWE:  
'You *do* sell books?'

AGNES:  
'What do these look  
like—grapefruit?'

Hawks' eye and his respect for visual rationality and function. Where a Lang would cut from one doorway to another, Hawks savours the little jaunt in between. And because nothing is pushed into the interval to justify it, so we begin to notice an openness to passing time and incidental behaviour that is as modern as Rivette, no matter that it is also braced by music here, visually slangy and an accomplice to the moody moments of the star system.

Shot 3 is inside the Acme, panning to the left with Marlowe as he walks towards the proprietress. The book describes only 'the fine-drawn face of an intelligent Jewess', who takes off her glasses as soon as Marlowe shows her his 'toy' badge. The screenplay calls her 'a

little tight, quite relaxed, and slightly philosophical', a set of variant attributes settled on screen by the fact of Dorothy Malone. She was nineteen when the picture was shot, and though it was not her first it did establish her as a new face and a droll, languorous personality.

The scene as scripted is quite limited compared to the movie, and the screen incident is altogether more suggestive and significant than the book cares to make it. Chandler used the proprietress only to supply a description of Geiger: that shrewd composite which Marlowe says would qualify her as a cop. In the novel, Marlowe thanks her and immediately goes about his business. In the script, he produces a bottle, there is a dissolve, afternoon slides into evening and then the pursuit moves on.

On screen, shots 4-7 are exquisitely casual two-shots, the characters disposed so that both faces are visible in either of two complementary angles. They are shots that seem eminently natural, yet the stance of the figures is anything but lifelike. Time and again, films have people stand closer together than they would in life to permit some kind of two-shot. Here, the figures are opened up to our gaze, a measure helped by having them loll back against a desk. Still, the marginal favouring is enough to accent the conversation, and the cuts are so little necessary that they spike the level of innuendo and attraction. On 7, having said he could try her, the proprietress moves farther back into the shop to research the 1860 *Ben-Hur*. As she goes, the camera pans with her and her expertise commands the one-figure medium shot: this *is* an intelligent woman, whether or not she is Jewish. The ability to recompose on a simple movement is one of Hawks' most sophisticated talents, and it is nothing less than philosophy that the framing never loses balance or confidence.

Shot 8 is a similar scale shot of Marlowe wondering about the Chevalier Audubon 1840, and shot 9 is the end of 7 with the woman knowing she has no need to search through her reference book for this specious question. Once more, the cross-cutting from one person to another is less combative or paranoid than a rally of complicity between them. The proprietress and the camera drift back to Marlowe, and in the harmonious reunion of the two-shot, shot 10, she says 'You begin to interest me, vaguely.' Malone and the camera movement endow this line with all kinds of cheek and allure—it is sexy, but it is also a sexy line read and listened to by cool





players. Sex being so automatic an element in photography, sexiness always works best as a conscious, half-mocked mannerism.

This shot favours Malone, and Bogart leans towards her with a deliciously 'confidential' act to say 'I'm a private dick on a case'—this is flagrant, yet modest self-parody, the amusement of the actors virtually expelling the reality of their roles. A reverse two-shot, 11, allows Malone to give the Geiger run-down, and Marlowe's stomach flinches as she lists the bookseller's paunch—but leaning forward in the first place exaggerated his belly. The kind of pretence that was rebuffed in Geiger's by Agnes' shrill commitment to duplicity is now revelled in by two players whose dominant sexual affinity is in the magic of make-believe.

Shot 12 has Marlowe going back towards the window, looking across the street towards Geiger's. It's starting to rain—after all, there was thunder as he crossed the street—but he has his car. Then the wickedly sly shot 13, a medium close-up of Malone, watching furtively to see if he has caught her hint—he is supposed to be a private investigator, after all. He has, of course: the editing style is his state of being, and in shot 14 (12 repeated) he recalls his rye and says 'I'd a lot rather get wet in here.' Wetness, when there is rain outside, and the slipperiness of dissolves in the film's form, very easily represents the tumescence of the moment.

Now comes the genius of odd behaviour and a moment no viewer could forget. It is in neither the book nor the script. Shot 15 is a medium shot of Malone, but then it pans with her going right to take in Bogart and the door. She pulls down the blind, but with her hands behind her back, needing a dainty, lewd dip of her whole body to get it all the way down. 'Looks like we're closed,' she sighs, despite so many possibilities seeming to open up. She moves out of frame left, leaving Marlowe on the right of the picture, not in the sharpest focus, but the personification of the aroused wolf. The image holds for a second, before Marlowe follows her, and in its lop-sidedness and slight blurring there is a rush of sexual excitement.

Shot 16 is a two-shot of them at her desk. But something troubles Marlowe: it is the 'typical' lack of appeal of girls who wear glasses. His fingers point at his own nose—where fake spectacles rested so recently—and he asks 'Do you have to?' She has a mirror ready on a filing cabinet. Off come the glasses, down slips the hair, and Bogart greets her, 'Well, hello.'

Malone herself seems quietly satisfied by the liberation. Were the glasses only a ploy for a clear-sighted seductress?

We then dissolve, not slowly but tenderly, to shot 17, looking out of the window at the shining wet street. There is very tactful music for an afternoon affair to regather itself, and the two come into the shot like sleepers waking. Marlowe now must be on his way, but there is a fondness left behind, talk of the next time he might have a query about a book, and Marlowe's utterly shameless 'So long, pal.'

Dorothy Malone had reason to be grateful to Howard Hawks. He had contrived a moment for her that set up a career. But womanhood is also rated in the sequence as the meek imprint of a man's dream about spectacles and hairstyles, about the facile availability of afternoon romances, and the complacency that 'So long, pal' is an adequate exit line. The

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PROPRIETRESS:  
'A couple of hours,  
an empty bottle,  
and so long, pal.  
That's life.'

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scene is so crammed with these assertions, and so enticingly put together, that the effect is very disconcerting. *The Big Sleep* is so witty and cool that it seems ponderous to disapprove of its ethics. Thus, there is a temptation to share the treatment of the proprietress as just another element in the camp panorama. How can it be offensive if the sequence is so laconic?

But that's not quite enough. In Hawks' films, the exclusion of reality and the obliging servitude of the arranged world are not immediately detectable. Still, *The Big Sleep* is a seemingly infinite realisation of male fantasies. I say infinite because the film encourages the feeling that it might go on forever. Moreover, the authority and ease of the style cloak the automatic chauvinism of the attitude. All the conventions of the illusion substantiate the realised dream: the world turns at Marlowe's bidding because no one questions his ideas. And just because private eye intrigue has been given up, so the texture of attitudes and manners becomes all the more important. Much later in the film, Marlowe gives

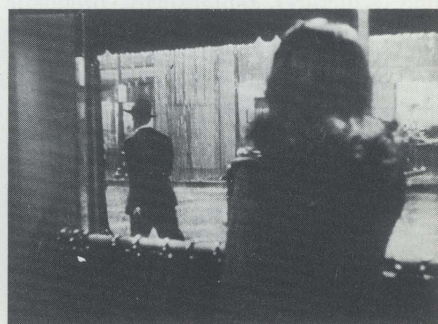
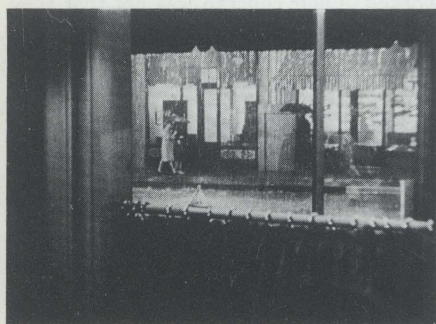
Vivian the supreme compliment—'You looked good back there.' It is a paradise—of style surpassing the childish inanity of material. But to the extent that the perfection is that of a myth, and one that does not bear close scrutiny, it is as if the very exultation of the work boasts of its own heartlessness.

That is not all. Later in *The Big Sleep*, a pair of waitresses are further, vying admirers for Marlowe. Hawks' films are littered with pretty women who give the hero the eye. In *The Big Sleep*, Marlowe presides over a gang of lovely but untrustworthy females. Their deviousness tries to condone his superiority. There is even the notorious, added 'horse-racing' scene, based upon Vivian's attempt to mislead Marlowe so that all the gloating double entendres seem like her wanting to bed the weary but valiant dick.

The contrast with Chandler is very interesting. The writer wanted his hero to be attractive, but the encounters with women never work out. Real dishonesty is damaging and ugly. At the conclusion of the movie of *The Big Sleep*, Bogart and Bacall are left together, impacted by the smoke of gunfire and cigarettes—it is a marriage, such as the stars deserved, no matter that all through the shooting of the film Bacall was in agonies of uncertainty as Bogart was torn between leaving and staying with his third wife. But in Chandler's book, the capricious Carmen is shot to pieces and Marlowe goes off alone to drink.

The Hawks hero is never lonely: if there are not pals of one sex or another, then he has his own high, imaginative sense of himself. We await a biography of Hawks: in America, Todd McCarthy is working on one that may show us greater ravages than the paradise of this film can admit. But we know some flaws and cracks, none of them honourable or good-looking. Hawks told Peter Bogdanovich years ago that he and Bogart made up the fag act, and kind of improvised it. Yet it is in the book and the script. What is not in either is the degree of campness—of insolent impossibility looking rakish and smart—that comes from films that are always decorating a very closed, fanciful world.

Hawks needed the big sleep, but the nightmare that recurs throughout is that the man was adolescent, randy and irresponsible. *The Big Sleep* still seems a magnificent comic creation, and a revelation of how early illusion and absurdity met in the American film. But its maker is utterly lost in paradise, daft with dreams of the Acme, without hope or thought of regaining reality. ■





# Let there be Lumière

Dai Vaughan



To look critically and sympathetically at the beginnings of cinema—at those programmes of one-minute scenes first publicly exhibited in Paris in December 1895, and in London the following February—is like pondering what happened to the universe in the first few microseconds after the big bang.

We need not doubt that, so far as the genesis of film art is concerned, these shows mounted by the Lumière brothers represent the nearest we will find to a singularity. Before them, notwithstanding such precedents as the photographic analysis of animal movement by Marey and Muybridge, the public projection of animated drawings in Reynaud's *Théâtre Optique* or anticipations of film narrative methods in comic strip and lantern slide sequence, cinema did not exist. A story so frequently repeated as to have assumed the status of folklore tells how members of the first audiences dodged aside as a train steamed towards them into a station. We cannot seriously imagine that these educated people in Paris and London expected the train to emerge from the screen and run them down. It must have been a reaction similar to that which prevents us from stepping with unconcern on to a static escalator, no matter how firmly we may assure ourselves that all it requires is a simple stride on an immobile flat surface. What this legend means is that the particular combination of visual signals present in that film had had no previous existence *other* than as signifying a real train pulling into a real station.

Yet already, in this primitive world, we find structures tantalisingly prophetic of some we know today. Compare the *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory*, few of whom return our gaze with even a glance from the screen, with the members disembarking from a river-boat for the *Congress of Photographic Societies at Neuville-sur-Saône*, who greet the camera with much waving and doffing of headgear. Do we not see here that distinction, much a part of our television experience, between those who wield the power of communication and those who

do not; between those granted subjectivity and those held in objectivity by the media?

Perhaps we should examine more closely the recorded responses of the earliest viewers. A curious example is offered in Stanley Reed's commentary to the BFI's sound version of the first British Lumière programme. This ended with *A Boat Leaving Harbour*; and we are told that visitors came forward after the performance to poke at the screen with their walking sticks, convinced that it must be made of glass and conceal a tank of water. While we may allow this to pass as a measure of the wonderment caused by the first cinematographic projections, it becomes on consideration rather puzzling. How could people have supposed that the screen concealed a tank when it would also, by the same supposition, have had to conceal a garden, a railway station, a factory and various other edifices? Yet I believe that this story, like the one about the train, is telling us something important.

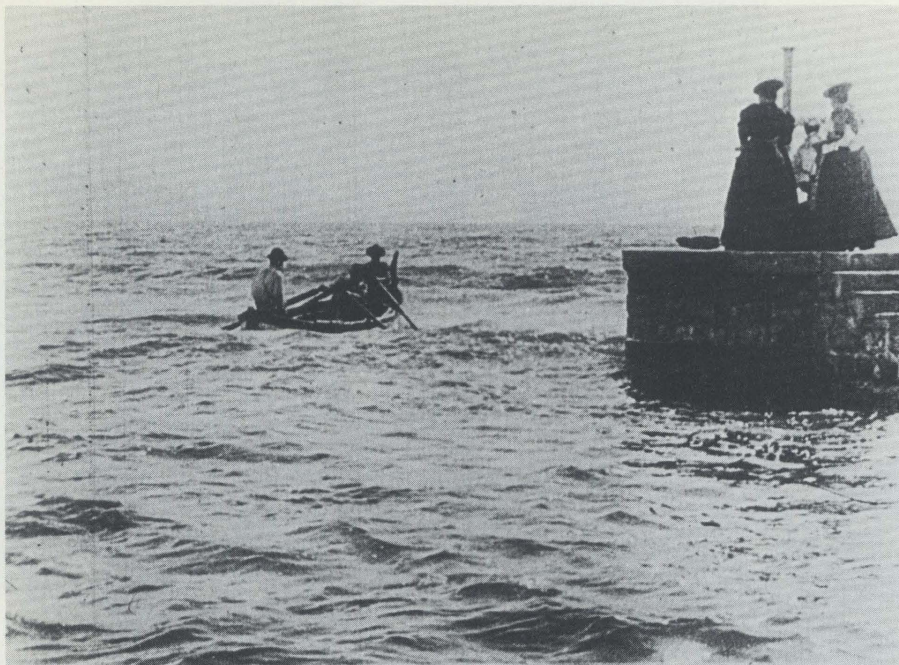
*A Boat Leaving Harbour* does, even today, stand out among the early Lumière subjects. (Indeed, an ulterior motive behind this article is my desire to pay tribute to a film I have loved since first encountering it some thirty years ago.) The action is simple. A rowing boat, with two men at the oars and one at the tiller, is entering boldly from the right foreground; and it proceeds, for fifty-odd seconds, towards the left background. On the tip of the jetty, which juts awkwardly into frame on the right, stand a child or two in frilly white and two women in black. Light shimmers on the water, though the sky seems leaden. The swell is not heavy; but as the boat passes beyond the jetty, leaving the protection of the harbour mouth, it is slewed around and caught broadside-on by the waves. The men are in difficulties; and one woman turns her attention from the children to look at them. There it ends. Yet every time I have seen this film I have been overwhelmed by a sense of the *potentiality* of the medium: as if it had

just been invented and lay waiting still to be explored.

I do not think it is just the Tennysonian resonances—crossing the bar, and so forth—which invest this episode with nostalgia for cinema's lost beginnings: a nostalgia which one would expect to be prompted equally, if at all, by the other items in the programme. One thing which will be obvious even from this brief description is that the subject could not possibly have been simulated in an indoor tank. So why *were* those early visitors poking at the screen with their sticks? A superficially similar reaction, this time to Edison's 'kinetoscope', is quoted in the first volume of Georges Sadoul's *Histoire Générale du Cinéma*. The kinetoscope was an individual viewing-box which ran continuous bands of film, the subjects being photographed by daylight in a blackened studio which could be revolved to face the sun; and in 1894 Henri de Parville wrote of it in *Les Annales Politiques et Littéraires*: 'Tous les acteurs sont en mouvement. Leurs moindres actes sont si naturellement reproduits qu'on se demande s'il y a illusion.' What he presumably meant by 'illusion' was some system by which the images of live actors might have been brought by mirrors under the eyepiece of the machine. But it is clear that the relevance of this lies not in similarity but in contrast; for there was no way that the image of a French harbour could have been reflected by mirrors into the auditorium of the Regent St Polytechnic. The gentlemen with the walking sticks were not trying to discover how the trick worked. Their concern was not that they might have been victims of an illusion, but that they had experienced something which transcended the cosy world of illusionism altogether.

We need look no further than Sadoul's standard *Histoire Générale* for evidence of the fact that what most impressed the early audiences were what would now be considered the incidentals of scenes: smoke from a forge, steam from a locomotive, brick-dust from a demolished wall. Georges Méliès, a guest at the first





Paris performance (who was soon to become a pioneer of trick filming), made particular mention of the rustling of leaves in the background of *Baby at the Breakfast Table*—a detail which, as Sadoul observes, would scarcely be remarked today. It is worth asking why this should be so—and why, by implication, we consider Lumière cinema and Edison not: for surely, it might be argued, what mattered was the photographic rendering of movement, regardless of what moved. Sadoul entitles his chapter on Lumière *La Nature Même Prise sur le Fait*; and Stanley Reed points out that audiences had hitherto been familiar only with the painted backdrops of the theatre. But to put it this way round is to understate the most revealing aspect: that people were startled not so much by the phenomenon of the moving photograph, which its inventors had struggled long to achieve, as by its ability to portray spontaneities of which the theatre was not capable. The movements of photographed people were accepted without demur because they were perceived as performance, as simply a new mode of self-projection; but that the inanimate should participate in self-projection was astonishing.

Most of the people in the Lumière show are either performing for the camera—whether knocking down walls or feeding babies—or engaged in such neutral activities as leaving the factory or alighting from a train. What is different about *A Boat Leaving Harbour* is that, when the boat is threatened by the waves, the men must apply their efforts to controlling it; and, by responding to the challenge of the spontaneous moment, they become integrated into its spontaneity. The unpredictable has not only emerged from the background to occupy the greater portion of the frame; it has also taken sway over the principals. Man, no longer the mountebank self-presenter, has become equal with the leaves and the brick-dust—and as miraculous.

But such an invasion of the spontaneous into the human arts, being unprecedented, must have assumed the

character of a threat not only to the 'performers' but to the whole idea of controlled, willed, obedient communication. And conversely, since the idea of communication had in the past been inseparable from the assumption of willed control, this invasion must have seemed a veritable doubling-back of the world into its own imagery, a denial of the order of a coded system: an escape of the represented from the representational act. Thus what the early audiences suspected was not the presence of a water-tank but the presence, in some metaphysical sense, of the sea itself: a sea liberated from the laboriousness of painted highlights and the drudgeries of metaphor. And their prodding of the screen was comparable with our own compulsion to reach out and 'touch' a hologram.

If this helps to explain why, in 1896, a representation of the sea should have caused greater bemusement than those of factory or railway station, it does not explain why *A Boat Leaving Harbour* should have retained its fascination for almost a hundred years. To understand this, we must turn the other way: not towards a notional first moment but towards the future already latent in Lumière. The earliest programme contained an episode, *Watering the Gardener*, which is generally considered to mark the initiation of screen narrative. A man is watering a garden; a boy puts his foot on the hose and stops the jet; the gardener peers into the nozzle; and the boy removes his foot so that the gardener is squirted in the face. But is this a fiction film or simply a filmed fiction?

One answer would be that the fiction film comes into being only when the articulations of camera movement and editing form an inalienable component of the narration. Another, slightly more sophisticated, would be that the distinction is meaningless at this primitive level of organisation, and that *Watering the Gardener* may be said to be filmed fiction and fiction film at once. But let us consider the question from the point of


view of what seemed at the time the essential triumph of Lumière: the harnessing of spontaneity. It is clear how this applies to the men rowing the boat; but it is far from clear how it applies in the *Gardener* episode.

At first it may seem that there are two simple alternatives: either this was an event observed in passing, perhaps with a concealed camera; or it was a scene staged by the film-maker with the complicity of both parties. Furthermore, the gaucheness of the performances suffices to resolve any doubt in favour of the latter, thus perhaps leading us—our definition swallowing its tail—to say that what we see is an *attempt* at a fiction film which, in so far as it is *perceived* only as an attempt, reverts to the spontaneous. But it is not so easy. Suppose, for example, that the camera had been set up only to record the garden-watering, and that the boy had played his trick unprompted; or that the boy and the cameraman had been in collusion to trick the gardener; or the boy and the gardener in collusion to surprise the cameraman... Spontaneity begins to seem, in human affairs, a matter less of behaviour than of motivations—and of transactions in which the part of the mountebank *behind* the camera cannot long be excluded from question. 'Spontaneity', that is to say, comes down to what is not predictable by—and not under the control of—the film-maker. As for the gaucherie, it is arguable that flawless performances would have given us not true fiction but mendacious actuality.

Fiction film arises at precisely the point where people tire of these riddles. As audiences settle for appearances, according film's images the status of dream or fantasy whose links with a prior world are assumed to have been severed if they ever existed, film falls into place as a signifying system whose articulations may grow ever more complex. True, the movement of leaves remains unpredictable; but we know that, with the endless possibility of re-takes open to the film-maker, what was unplanned is nevertheless what has been chosen. Even in documentary, which seeks to respect the provenance of its images, they are bent inexorably to foreign purpose. The 'big bang' leaves only a murmur of background radiation, detectable whenever someone decides that a film will gain in realism by being shot on 'real' locations or where the verisimilitude of a Western is enhanced, momentarily, by the unscripted whinny of a horse.

*A Boat Leaving Harbour* begins without purpose and ends without conclusion, its actors drawn into the contingency of events. Successive viewings serve only to stress its pathetic brevity as a fragment of human experience. It survives as a reminder of that moment when the question of spontaneity was posed and not yet found to be insoluble: when cinema seemed free, not only of its proper connotations, but of the threat of its absorption into meanings beyond it. Here is the secret of its beauty. The promise of this film remains untarnished because it is a promise which can never be kept; its every fulfilment is also its betrayal. ■





# HELL UP IN THE BRONX


RICHARD COMBS reviews *Gloria* and *Raging Bull*

Ships that pass in the night. John Cassavetes' *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* (1976), about a strip-club entrepreneur in debt to the Mob, was apparently dreamt up in the course of an evening with Martin Scorsese. 'We were talking about stories, and we said, well, let's do a gangster story.' Cassavetes' *Gloria*, about an ex-showgirl and gangster's moll on the run from the Mob, begins with one of those aerial journeys across the neon escarpments of New York City, until the camera arrives at the South Bronx and begins a circling descent over the Yankee Stadium. The Stadium doesn't feature in Scorsese's *Raging Bull*, the story of middleweight boxing champion Jake La Motta and his running battle with local mobsters, but towards the end of his career the 'Bronx Bull' did fight there.

Cassavetes' and Scorsese's origins as ethnic New Yorkers are part of the mythology of their film-making. Of Greek extraction, Cassavetes as a child lived in the Bronx—and, according to Sam Shaw, the producer of *Gloria*, in Yankee Stadium ('John loves baseball more than pictures. He'll tell you who stole second in 1940'). Of Italian immigrant parentage, Scorsese lived on the Lower East Side from age eight (which was roughly La Motta's age when he and his family left there), and completed his Catholic schooling, having at one time been a

candidate for the priesthood, at Cardinal Hayes High School in the Bronx. Street life and street theatre mingle in *Shadows* and *Mean Streets*, their freshness as cinema also having something to do with their zestful involvement with the fringes of society—whether beyond the law or not.

Apart from that, the differences between the two directors might seem radical. Cassavetes has been the great advocate of a cinema of the 'real', in which story, technique and construction are secondary considerations to what is going on inside the performer. 'I want to put those inner desires on the screen so we can all look and think and feel and marvel at them.' Scorsese's movies probably score as high for raw emotion, particularly when those inner desires are rooted in religious taboos and family guilt. But he is also a high priest of movie lore, and the traps into which his characters hurtle are operated with as keen a sense for the metaphysics of narrative as of sin and redemption. His is a cinema of the super-real, in which Catholic anguish gravitates not towards Cassavetes' therapeutic practice of 'letting it all hang out' but towards the expressionism-in-repression of Visconti, Michael Powell and even John Ford. Cassavetes values emotional excess because it might lead him somewhere he has not been before, outstripping any



*Beating the system? La Motta (Robert De Niro)*

possible form; Scorsese because it might lead to spiritual success, a transcendence of form (cinematic/religious) over content.

Important as these differences appear in their films, what separates them (artistic temperament) might still be close to what connects them (artistic temper). Their joint authorship of *Chinese Bookie* is interesting, because there is a mystery at the heart of that film where the ethic of one meshes (or doesn't quite) with that of the other. Out of foolish vanity, Cosmo Vittelli (Ben Gazzara) becomes embroiled with the local syndicate, and is forced to clear his debt by carrying out a hit on the bookie of the title. In the course of a subsequent double-cross he is mortally wounded, but the more serious his plight becomes, the less seriously he seems able to take it. He returns to his





prepares to take a dive; Gloria (Gena Rowlands) has gun, will travel.

night-club, the hole in his side no excuse for the show not going on, and finally articulates his philosophy of being 'comfortable': being at ease with the roles you play in order to hide from others. At the end, he stands alone outside the club, absent-mindedly rubbing the wound which is still leaking blood, the epitome of a comfortable, if dying, man.

On the other hand, given Cosmo's talent for self-deception throughout, and the emphasis on putting on an act in the context of the club, it is difficult to know how to take this moment of deliverance. Confronting insincerity in order to force it to become real, stripping away the layers of 'performance', has always been Cassavetes' existential goal. But the fascination, and frustration, of *Chinese Bookie* is that it is burrowing into Cosmo's 'reality' even while declaring

that everything about him is a pretence—especially the kind of film which has given him to us in the first place.

In between 'let's do a gangster story' and another remark of Cassavetes', apropos *Chinese Bookie*, 'I really don't like gangsters a hell of a lot ... I don't appreciate people trying to take advantage of other people's weaknesses,' is encapsulated his distrust of being taken over by a movie genre and the reason why, perhaps, there are too many games going on in the film for him quite to convince us that he has reached the bedrock of Cosmo Vittelli. There are probably even more games, including Pirandellian ones, in his next film, *Opening Night*, about theatre folk. But one of them is not the director protecting his rear against the traps and snares of genre cinema.

What that last shot of Cosmo rhymes with, of course, is the ending of *Taxi Driver*, in which Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro) seems to have risen above the blood-boltered incidents of his recent past and to have found inner peace—or a more complete alienation, an ambiguous consummation which becomes a tougher ending in *Raging Bull*. If both *Chinese Bookie* and *Taxi Driver* are working towards the same point, however, they have different reasons for getting there. For Scorsese, 'doing a gangster story' would not be a way of holding plot disdainfully at a distance but a powerful device for orchestrating the fate of his hero, to the point where he must either win redemption/transcendence or go under. If that was the original drive of the story he wrote with Cassavetes, then it may be that the latter felt the need to go in another direction: to validate rather than transform his hero, and to do so by steadily winding down the gangster plot or showing it to be mere trumpery. Hence the dislocation in our final sense of Cosmo: he overcomes his own death neither as a wholly substantial Cassavetes hero nor as a fully transfigured Scorsese one.

What, then, of *Gloria*, which is much more of a gangster movie than *Chinese Bookie*—its plot, for a start, makes sense at that level, which *Bookie's* never really does. Again, there is something of a game about this, a project initiated on a 'let's do ...' basis. In an article in *American Film* (January/February, 1980), Cassavetes describes how, at the coincidentally double urging of his wife, Gena Rowlands, and an MGM executive (who was looking for a part for their moppet champ Ricky Schroder), he wrote a script featuring a child, as something he would sell, not direct himself. 'It was no great shakes, but I liked it and Gena liked it.' MGM then lost Schroder to Disney; the script went via Cassavetes' agent to Columbia; and they agreed it as a project for Ms Rowlands provided that Cassavetes directed. For the first time since his unhappy experiences of the early 60s (*Too Late Blues*, *A Child Is Waiting*), Cassavetes found himself not merely employed but actually sought after by a major studio.

The resulting film, however, comes on as if it were going to do more than dabble in the commercial mainstream. It aggressively courts the audience in the terms of any contemporary hard-nosed urban thriller. After the initial trip up to the Bronx (prefaced with titles done as children's paintings), and some atmospheric scene-setting along the decaying Grand Concourse, it moves into an apocalyptic siege. Jack Dawn (Buck Henry), an accountant for the Mob, has been talking to the FBI, and he and his Puerto Rican wife and children hysterically await the hoods who even now are assembling in the peeling mausoleum of a tenement. Before the nuclear family, seemingly already set to shake apart, is unceremoniously exploded, their neighbour from down the hall, one Gloria 'Swenson' (after Swenson—Gena Rowlands), comes calling for some coffee, and is persuaded to hide the Dawns' young son, Phil (John



Adames), into whose hands his father presses his vital book of numbers ('This book will save your life. It's the Bible. It's everything I know about. Everything in the world. It's your future').

Gloria, hard-bitten moll that she is, professes to despise children, pointing out to Phil that she has her own life to think about ('You're too young to know what making a living is, but I got my money, I got my apartment, I got my friends, my cat'). But she soon feels compelled to abandon her sanctuary for the boy's sake, precipitately taking flight into the city and significantly dropping her cat in her first effort to retain control of wilful Phil. Their situation is complicated by the fact that the friends she has mentioned are the very people pursuing them, and by the macho pretensions of her six-year-old charge, another last gift from his father ('You're the man. You're the head of the family').

Two very different yet complementary things are going on in this brilliant opening. One is as crisp and energetic an exposition as one could wish of the chase movie to come. Within that is what one might think of as the Cassavetes movie: emotions either ricocheting off the walls of the tight genre construction (the Dawn family hotly bickering while death gathers outside) or letting the air out in unexpected places (Gloria itemising her possessions for Phil's benefit, so that he can appreciate a little of her struggle before she gets any further involved in his). The helicopter trip across the New York skyline, luminescently photographed by Fred Schuler, accompanied by a score that is a remarkable rhapsody in black and blue, wailing saxophone combined with plangent guitar, has already hinted at the film's lissom way with a familiar image, its febrile switching through a scale of moods.

Once Gloria and Phil are out on the streets, the locations come directly into play—not, as the cliché goes, as characters in their own right, more as yet another unpredictable factor in the unstable gell of relationships. They function at times like the genre plot—familiar bases that the characters touch in their flight by bus, cab and subway, through restaurant kitchens and tenement halls, in hotels and flophouses. At others, they are the film's touchstone of reality, by which it measures a faintly parodic distance from the plot.

Gloria throughout has an interesting relationship with taxicabs and their drivers, one that appears as difficult and fraught with the unexpected as her efforts to preserve Phil from the Mob. It is a relationship, furthermore, that Cassavetes deliberately plays off against the basic genre calculation of making his outsider-hero, against whom every hand in the underworld is turned, a woman—and the plot's demand for escalating displays of her prowess as a gunperson. Gloria, for instance, blasting away a carful of hoods who have attempted to pick up her and Phil, then rushing into the street to hail one of those fleeting yellow apparitions; or Gloria backing down a street, gun held on the seething hoods she has just humiliated, and her cabbie obligingly waiting with the door held

open. It is hard, anyway, to imagine a Cassavetes thriller that would not be involved with the real problems of the city. Even hit men turn up late for their assignments: 'I couldn't find the place ... I went over the 138th Street Bridge, then back over the 155th Street Bridge, made a wrong turn past the Yankee Stadium ...'

It is also no small part of the game here that Cassavetes' characters often treat it as such. Or at least that Gloria, the holding point between the genre that has been adopted and the 'reality' that Cassavetes is trying to open it up to, is often seen struggling to reconcile the two. There is her reluctance at the beginning to abandon her apartment and her own life, her occasional exasperation with the business she is caught up in ('My feet are falling off. I can't run any more. What am I doing here?'), and her effort to explain everything to Phil as a dream, a nightmare in which he might think he has been killed but from which he will always wake up knowing he is someone else. Shades here of Cosmo Vittelli, and his effort to wake out of the gangster plot into which he has allowed his life to get sidetracked. It is a notion which Cassavetes, a little dubiously, stands on its head when he ends his 'real' film with a dream or wish-fulfilment reunion.

Again, part of the trick of *Gloria* is the illusion—fostered by tight, nervy direction, regular (even repetitive) bursts of action—that there is a plot (in more than one sense). Gloria's dashing about always seems singularly directionless—until the idea pops into her head of taking Phil to Pittsburgh, which later prompts the paranoid coda, 'Maybe Pittsburgh's connected. They gotta have gangsters in Pittsburgh too.' But the idea of a vast organisation being mobilised to crush them is explicitly parodied in an exchange between Gloria and Phil: (P) 'You think they're gonna catch us, huh?' (G) 'Probably. You can't beat the system.' (P) 'What's the system?' (G) 'System? I don't know.' (P) 'Then how do you know you can't beat it?' The joke is as applicable to the movie system as it is to the Mafia, and the moral is that not only the characters but the film-maker should have the courage to explore his own freedom.

Gloria's relationship with Phil skirts another convention: the precocious brat versus his/her worldly wise senior. But Cassavetes' tactic, as with the gangster elements, is not to pretend that the cliché doesn't exist, but to exaggerate it to the point where it becomes its own truth. The equivalent here of Gloria bursting upon a gaggle of gangsters, gun levelled in a no-nonsense crouch, frisking them and then locking them in the toilet, is Phil sitting in the window of a dingy flophouse, lit by the ubiquitous winking red light, then turning to Gloria to complain, 'These neon lights are driving me crazy,' and to provoke her with questions like, 'Have you ever been in love?' So forward at times is little Phil, clenching his fists and insisting 'I am the man,' then contritely apologising later for the trouble he has caused, that it's impossible not to see him as every macho hero on the lam, shrunk to pint size. Gloria

then becomes the archetypal woman in tow, swollen to reluctant motherhood, wiping his bloody nose and telling him, 'You are not the man. You don't listen. You don't know anything. You're driving me crazy.'

With his shrill self-assertion, his cavalier assumptions of command followed by ingratiating confessions of ignorance, there are times when the 'hero' of *Gloria* resembles that of *Raging Bull*. The context of the two films is much the same—not just the Bronx, but the family as crucible of the known world, including the forms of social patronage and exploitation and the extremes of violence. Jake La Motta also has his much-abused attendants to wipe his bloody nose and tell him what an unthinking ape he is. But in terms of film-making, it would probably be more accurate to see *Gloria* as moving into *Mean Streets* territory. Cassavetes also engaged with a Hollywood genre in *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie*; the difference here is that he is willing to be seen doing so. By this short step aside, he has moved closer to Scorsese; concomitantly, *Raging Bull* represents a change of tack which takes Scorsese closer to Cassavetes. *Gloria* and *Raging Bull* are indisputably their respective directors' films. But over them both hangs the ghostly collaboration—mooted but not clinched on *Chinese Bookie*—of the other.

To begin with, *Raging Bull* seems to have been made out of an impatience with all the usual trappings of cinema, with plot, psychology and an explanatory approach to character. A number of early scenes, conversations between Jake La Motta (Robert De Niro) and his brother Joey (Joe Pesci) about Jake's career, his intransigence, his violent behaviour outside the ring, even about a neighbourhood girl, Vickie (Cathy Moriarty), sitting beside a pool, have an intensity but a woolliness, an emotional fervour but a roundabout, elliptical, barely heard inconsequentiality that seem to frustrate any narrative function. They are also the first indication, in the linking of intimacy with casual obscenity, that the language of violence and the violence of language is itself going to be the binding element of the film.

In place of the narrative traps being sprung within the first few minutes of *Taxi Driver*, characters here appear to be finding themselves in their own time, or in real time, à la Cassavetes. It's an impression which Scorsese has strengthened by obscuring as far as possible the traces of the period film. La Motta's life from 1941, through his decade or so of success as a fighter, to the humiliations of the 50s and his end as an entertainer, the showman of his own notoriety, is recreated with a minimum of props, very few scenes outside the venues of home and ring, and none of the self-conscious artifice of *New York, New York*. Though spanning some of the same period, *Raging Bull* couldn't be further in style from Scorsese's last dramatic feature. For much of the time, *Raging Bull* is an unadorned window on the world, and even a shot which stirs memories of *New York, New York*—an





Jake La Motta dishes it out, but is about to go down on points.

overhead, from the point of view of an organist trying to restore order with a spirited rendition of the national anthem, as the ring disappears in a mêlée of flying chairs and bodies after an early decision goes against La Motta—has been reproduced directly from La Motta's autobiography.

Further neutralising the narrative, Scorsese has peopled it, De Niro apart, with unknowns—faces that are richly suggestive of time and place but don't seem to belong to actors, they stand for nothing other than themselves. (Cassavetes, it might be noted, even having gone genre in *Gloria*, is still casting the same way, with the exception of his joke guest star, bespectacled, worried Buck Henry—a Mafia accountant, certainly, but the paterfamilias of a Puerto Rican family?) Which is not to say that the elements of the drama to come, the hooks, aren't being planted from the very beginning. A long track follows Joey as he argues with Salvy (Frank Vincent), errand boy of the local godfather, about Jake's refusal to sell out to the gangsters who control the fight game, which will eventually endanger his chances of reaching the middleweight championship; Joey's subsequent conversation with Jake leads from the latter's confessions of inadequacy (he has 'girl's hands', he'll never be big enough to fight Joe Louis) to his goading Joey into punching him

until the blood starts from recent boxing cuts.

But the point of this drama will remain strictly interior, just as the violence—explosive as it is in the continual round of domestic quarrels paired with the more brutal but disciplined, aggressive but stylised exchanges in the ring—always seems to be imploding into significance. It is keyed to the dominant feature of La Motta's personality and his boxing style: his tendency, his need, to overcome simply by absorbing as much punishment as his opponent can dish out. La Motta flings himself against the wall of his fate: refusing to give in to the Mob, until he is forced to throw a fight in order to get his shot at the middleweight title, almost sacrificing his career and his reputation in the process; losing his last fight with 'Sugar' Ray Robinson, but refusing to 'lose' by refusing to go down, instead just soaking up the other man's punches.

There is in this something not dissimilar to Harvey Keitel testing himself, his hand in the devotional flame, in *Mean Streets*. Except that, although the icons are present, the religious dimension of La Motta's struggle is not articulated. In a way, it has been assumed, absorbed into the film. It is there according to Scorsese: 'He works on an almost primitive level, almost an animal level. And therefore he must think in a different

way, he must be aware of certain things spiritually that we aren't, because our minds are too cluttered with intellectual ideas, and too much emotionalism. And because he's on that animalistic level, he may be closer to pure spirit' (Mary Pat Kelly, *Martin Scorsese: The First Decade*). The animal is evident, in the caged images of La Motta in cramped tenements, in a netting-enclosed swimming pool, and in the prison 'hole' in Florida where he winds up at the nadir of his fortunes. The spirit is only evident in its absence, in Scorsese's rigorously realistic black and white images, which refuse to pollute the concrete with the spiritual (or vice versa). Despite *Taxi Driver's* pretensions to the title, *Raging Bull* may be his most Bressonian film.

What also disappears into that scheme is any psychological, dramatic, or even narrative framework to La Motta's story. This, actually, is supplied in abundance by the boxer's autobiography, on which the film is loosely based. There La Motta explains his feelings of guilt and inadequacy, his sense that he didn't deserve good fortune and that Fate would one day be waiting with the bill, in terms of his religious upbringing and the notions of sin and redemption that permeated his early life of crime (not mentioned by the film). He hangs great psychological and spiritual consequences by one incident in particular: how he thought for many years that he had murdered a man, a bookie, in the course of a mugging for which he was never brought to account. One can imagine how Scorsese might have adapted such a story (title: 'The Killing of a Jewish Bookie'?) into another *Mean Streets*. Instead, it is as if he had purified all the elements of that tyro film, stripping them of their melodramatic or operatic function so that *Raging Bull* could be a transparent vessel for La Motta's passion, which is also his violence, self and other-directed.

Simulated home movie footage, for instance, serves at the beginning of *Mean Streets* to complicate the film's impact and to suggest, perhaps, a multi-layered investigation to come. Here it has the opposite effect, interspersed with brief glimpses of La Motta's fights in the mid-40s, and rendering the characters' lives down into their most banal, generalised terms: fooling by the pool; Jake and Vickie getting married; Joey and his wife getting married; playing with the kids. Given that this footage is in 'amateurish' colour, the rough, unstable textures of a world already slipping into memory—as opposed to the surrounding, crystalline black and white—it inevitably has a poignance. But it not only serves to summarise, it frustrates the biopic interest: these are areas that are unknowable.

Similarly, Scorsese never dramatises—at least, not in the usual way—the rise and fall of La Motta's career. The story is told in simple chronological units, starting with a fight La Motta loses in 1941, with most of the succeeding ring scenes anchored in his recurring bouts with Robinson (also lost in the main), and the montage of fights that interrupts the home movies mostly just a few 'frozen' moments, with titles giving names and dates. Again, what is lost is



the exterior drama. La Motta's struggle to become champion (achieved in 1949 against Marcel Cerdan) is displaced into a struggle with interior demons—'interior' in this context, however, having to do with more than one individual.

Jake's relationship with Joey suggests an identification, a symbiosis, that goes beyond the fraternal. It is an intensification of Charlie's love-hate affair with Johnny Boy in *Mean Streets*, and in its closeness subsumes a sado-masochistic violence that also has a cultural and social dimension. There is an inevitable progression here: Jake, out of paranoid jealousy, asking Joey to keep an eye on Vickie to make sure she is not fooling around; Joey becoming enraged on Jake's behalf when he sees Vickie out with some of the local hoods, and viciously beating up Salvy; Jake then later assuming that if anybody has betrayed him with Vickie, it is Joey. He bursts into the latter's home, furiously assaulting him without a word, just as Joey is correcting one of his children's table manners by threatening him with a knife.

The roots of that jealousy and that violence are presumably locked in the sense of guilt and unworthiness that La Motta is at pains to explain in his book. Scorsese never attempts to explain them, but has set himself the more difficult task of making them manifest. What is most remarkable about the new rigour of *Raging Bull* is that it tells La Motta's story with both complete realism (the places, the circumstances, the events) and total subjectivity. In a way that leaves them difficult to disentangle and analyse, each is even made to seem a function of the other. The sequence of La Motta's fights has a kind of documentary flatness, but each bout is treated with visual and aural distortions to become a mini-Armageddon. Instead of shooting the fights with many cameras, Scorsese has said, he used only one, working in close enough to become a third antagonist. Even the fact that La Motta fought many engagements with Robinson has a different, internal truth: in his book, La Motta refers to Robinson as his 'nemesis'; here he comments, after losing their third match, 'Who knows, I'm a jinx maybe.' Scorsese's most persistent distortion, slow motion, used at times so briefly and infinitesimally as to make one doubt it really happened, renders La Motta's internal violence concrete by focusing on the confused objects of his adoration and aggression—Vickie, often dressed in white, as in their first, dreamlike excursion, and the invariably dark-clad gangster-businessmen who would take over his life—the constituent elements of his heaven and hell.

At the beginning of his autobiography, Jake La Motta recollects his tenement childhood and wild youth. 'I feel like I'm looking at an old black-and-white movie of myself ... jerky, with gaps in it, a string of poorly lit sequences, some of them with no beginning and some with no end. No musical score, just sometimes the sound of a police siren or a pistol shot. And almost all of it happens at night, as if I lived my whole life at night.' It might be tempting to apply this to the

way Scorsese has filmed *Raging Bull*. Except that what La Motta is recalling seems more like the kind of B movie that Scorsese built on to make *Mean Streets*. On the other hand, there is in that description a generalised sense of the movie-in-all-our-minds—an equation of the excitements of the archetypal Hollywood movie with a romantic life beyond the law, an equation forcefully operating in the environment in which the La Mottas and the Scorseses grew up. Romantically, the options facing the young Scorsese have been summed up as: priest or mafioso. Instead, he made movies, sublimating the other two. *Raging Bull* then becomes the sublimation of a sublimation. It evokes that generalised movie mainly because, in purifying his technique, Scorsese has stripped away his references, reducing them to some essential experience.

Mainly this is to record how La Motta himself sublimated his history, his background, to become a boxer, then sublimated that self to become an entertainer (another stage, that of film actor, is not recorded here). The boxing ring, it turns out, was not that far from the streets, from the mafioso option. La Motta must fall in with the Mob to get his chance at the title; as fight succeeds fight, the flashbulbs going off in the arena sound more and more like gunshots; and as he sits in Miami with Vickie and his children in 1956, having just given up boxing and before embarking on his ill-fated night-club venture, a photographer's equipment is shown in action as if it were an assassin's rifle. The film both begins and ends with La Motta in New York in 1964, his boxing glory and his family gone, rehearsing his stand-up routine in a night-club dressing room. 'Give me a stage where this bull here can rage. And although I can fight, I'd much rather recite ... that's entertainment.'

La Motta, alone at the end with his make-up and his mirror, conjures Cosmo Vittelli once more. But where the latter is mysteriously released, by an act of the director's will, La Motta apparently defies Scorsese's conception of him as a man who lost everything and was then redeemed, remaining locked in his failures, identifying with Marlon Brando in *On the Waterfront*: 'I could have been a contender, instead of a bum, which is what I am.' Unless, in Scorsese's religiously denuded new scheme, redemption, like the presence of the spirit, cannot be made visible—although it might be guessed at in the harshly contrasting tones of black and white in which the hero frequently seems immolated. What has also been immolated, purged, is Scorsese's own past: the genre cinema out of which he made *Boxcar Bertha*, *Mean Streets*, *Taxi Driver* and *New York, New York*. In readjusting their strategies, he and Cassavetes would appear to have crossed in the night.

Except that what they still hold in common is a terrain, an area which reveals as much of a shared background—in national, ethnic, or simply New York street terms—as parallel attitudes to cinema. La Motta's autobiography is credited with two additional authors. One, Peter Savage, is

revealed to be his close friend, manager and one-time partner in crime (a character amalgamated with his brother Joey in *Raging Bull*); the other, Joseph Carter, is conceivably the priest, Father Joseph, who helps to start La Motta's boxing career in prison, and then seems to have played the Pat O'Brien role through the rest of his life. Those two angels still hover at Scorsese's shoulder, not so much exorcised in the scrupulously uncluttered patterns of *Raging Bull* as themselves transmuted into more essential forms. Religion is an influence in suspension, and the gangsters are no longer the stuff of melodrama but of an all-pervading, unquestionable mechanism of social control and alienation. So much is evident in tiny, unstressed details (Salvy dropping a note and a quiet word with the old man who sits at the door of a gym), and in the central scene where Joey is summoned to the 'Debonair Social Club,' chided for his beating of Salvy and made to shake hands, and given the word that unless his brother returns to the fold and pays his dues, there will be no championship fight.

In *Gloria*, the equivalent of that scene comes towards the end. Deciding that the only way to get the hoods off her back is to beard them in their den, Gloria confronts the local *capo* and offers him Jack Dawn's account book in return for her own and Phil's life. But Gloria at this point seems to be the only one behaving by the genre rules. Cassavetes directs against the grain of any tension: a group of elderly men sit in an elegantly but randomly furnished apartment, casually in conference; Gloria is put on one side; other individuals come and go, including the minions who have been pursuing her and Phil, evidently no more certain of their place here than she is. Eventually the dapper godfather, whose mistress Gloria once was, questions her about the book and the boy, soothes her fears of death and worse ('Life is very dear'), and only notes disapprovingly, 'You can't go around shooting our people. Every time we try to talk to you, you pull a gun.' Finally, chancing her luck, Gloria leaves the book and walks out.

The reverberations of the scene are complex. In part, its disarrayed air reflects the gangsters' cultivated pretence of not being gangsters; in part, Cassavetes' assumption that real gangsters aren't like movie gangsters. An underlying element is his response to the milieu—the stresses and strains of an interchange where meaning resides in covert moves and things unsaid. Gangsters, after all, are a kind of family, and they are also performers. Cassavetes has explored varieties of drop-out, working-class, middle-class and suburbanite milieus; here he trades them, with more certainty than in *Chinese Bookie*, for another community that also takes him into one of the cinema's own communal myths. And much as he dislikes the advantage these people take of others, he has to see it as a working option. The *American Film* article cited earlier (entitled, 'John Cassavetes: Film's Bad Boy') includes the quote, 'I'm a gangster. If I want something I'll grab it.' Well, let's do a gangster story. ■



## 'All ways out are closed'

*From the Life of the Marionettes/John Pym*



*'From the Life of the Marionettes': Robert Atzorn and Christine Buchegger.*

We have met Peter and Katarina before, though they were then, before their creator Ingmar Bergman's voluntary exile in West Germany, played by Jan Malmström and Bibi Andersson. In 'Innocence and Panic', the first episode of *Scenes from a Marriage* (1973), the couple were Johan and Marianne's quarrelling dinner guests, peripheral characters in what was a bleak but finally optimistic view of the human condition. In *From the Life of the Marionettes* (ITC), its title proposing a shift to unequivocal fatalism, Peter and Katarina Egermann (Robert Atzorn and Christine Buchegger), now the focus of attention, are forced to recognise that the personal accommodation they described in the earlier film, and which kept their marriage afloat, will no longer suffice. 'Do you remember the beginning of our marriage? The effort we made?' Katarina asks in the aftermath of another coruscating public row. 'We had a capital, a capital of love, if you like,' Peter replies. 'We squandered it all and got nothing in its place.'

Filed in the Bavaria Studios, Munich, and with the same key crew members used for *The Serpent's Egg* (1977), Bergman's second German film marks a return to the chamber drama. The film covers some six weeks: it begins and ends in harsh drained colour, in two infernal cells, one created for 'pleasure', the other for 'restraint', and then, cutting back and forth in time, runs the gamut of black and white values—dream sequences are almost bleached-out, flashbacks have a faint newsreel graininess, 'reality' a surreal clarity, of either light or shade, depending on the tone of a particular scene.

Not only is Sven Nykvist's photography a beguiling mosaic, but Bergman's narrative, the examination of the roots of a 'catastrophe', requires one to

see it whole before the pattern is revealed. It proceeds from Peter's murder and sodomisation of a prostitute, via the interviews of an anonymous investigator, unseen until halfway through, to an examination of his childhood, his relationship with his wife and therapist, the pattern of his business and social life.

A successful, self-possessed businessman (and Bergman conjures his working life with a serpentine pan up the side of an office block, and a dark scene in which the abstracted Peter can still dictate a long precise technical memo), Peter lives within a constricting circle of family and friends. Without his knowing it, the constriction has been growing steadily worse. The accepted, cathartic, round of drinking, ritual parties and tranquillising drugs, together with his wife's success—she is the co-owner of a fashion business—and their mutual infidelities, which, he claims, enhance their own sex life, finally no longer works.

For several years, Peter has been troubled by a fear he cannot quite take seriously. He describes a dream in an unsent letter to his therapist Mogens (Martin Benrath). In an early morning moment of timeless tranquillity, he finds himself incapable of making love to Katarina. 'She looked at me with half-closed eyes and smiled. I was seized with an insane fury and drew away so as not to kill her. I was nearly choking with rage and terror. I was to be calm ... There was a moment of tenderness, of complete silence. It's hard to describe that particular moment. The air changed, becoming soft and easy to breathe. The greyness was dispersed and replaced by a gentle, subdued light, like friendly hands stroking our bruised bodies. We met in a sudden intimacy without reserve. Then it happened—ghastly, unbelievable, irrevocable. All at once Katarina

was dead, and I knew that I had killed her in some cruel and painful way ...'

Bergman proposes an old duality. Peter's dream, however, which he acts out not on his wife but on a prostitute who bears her name (Rita Russek), also suggests, and Peter himself finally realises this, that he is so essentially dead, so completely under the control of the casual, silent Puppeteer, that to break out, to achieve one moment of 'life', he must resort to the ultimate act of barbarism. He has, as Mogens suggests in a weary summary of the case, broken the pattern of his life, made himself a potential suicide. 'Only someone who kills himself possesses himself entirely.' He is, of course, yet another of Bergman's deeply troubled—some might now say insufferably troubled—sounding-boards.

This is not vintage Bergman. For one thing, notably well acted, by stage performers, though the film is, these Germans have the curious air of being displaced Swedes. Ravaged souls they may be, but, despite for instance a fear-some capacity for alcohol, the principals' bodies seem almost superhumanly unmarked. For another, this, unlike *The Serpent's Egg*, is a displaced narrative. Its bars, fashion salons, bedrooms, kitchens, offices and consulting rooms belong to Bergmanland, not intrinsically to Germany. Only the autobahn, seen from a threatening high-angle, marks the society in which Bergman, one feels, is a decidedly uneasy guest.

*From the Life of the Marionettes* is, however, significant. If only because of the sheer relentlessness of Bergman's concerns, his terrier-like refusal to let the subject of man's unhappiness go. Unlike Peter, who feels in the film's key phrase that 'all ways out are closed' and describes his sense of ennui as circular (to define it brings it on), Bergman draws satisfaction from finding new ways to present what for him becomes an ever blacker prospect. The zigzagging interviews are intercut with the puppeteer Bergman's own interventions, taking his audience into areas outside the investigation, or as in the case of Peter's unsent letter into the head of his protagonist. The piecing together of the mystery—almost a murder mystery—is done with pared dispassion, as though the director himself was as enervated as his characters.

The enervated tone, however, is used to summon up those hallmarked moments of nearly unbearable pathos. (The human condition has for Bergman long since ceased to be tragic.) One such comes at the end of the sequence in which Tim (Walter Schmidinger) unburies himself to Katarina Egermann, his business partner, the one person capable of disinterested sympathy. At the end, the horror of his homosexual life having been anatomised, he asks her to take his hand and place it against her cheek: a pre-echo of Peter's dream and the moment that is to trigger the murder. Can she feel anything, he asks. She nods automatically with a look close to tears,



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and then, seeing he has seen through her, quickly, irrevocably, shakes her head.

Bergman's narrative is a shade too crafted. A chance meeting leads Peter to Katarina Krafft, known as Ka, Tim's procurer and prostitute friend. Tim tells the investigator that by making the introduction he had hoped to lure Peter, whom he loved, away from his wife. These machinations lack the naturalistic authenticity of the entanglements of *Scenes from a Marriage*. Nevertheless, the sequence preceding the murder does have an exact ring. The peepshow where Ka works is a tawdry modern circus; but the prostitute, a somehow sanctified performer, is marked by a striking vivacity—she is, ironically, no marionette. At the last moment, she shows Peter (and the shot opens the film) a moment of spontaneous kindness. 'I'm tired,' he says. And she takes his head on her shoulder and holds it with her hand. 'You must

sleep now.' He senses an unattainable harmony. It is, of course, the moment foreseen in his dream: a moment he has accidentally come to, trapped after hours in an airless, locked cellar.

Bergman cannot quite bring himself to close all the exits. At a subsequent meeting between Peter's mother and Katarina Egermann, the latter describes her sense of haunted guilt at the prostitute's death. And Ka herself does represent, despite her function as the 'innocent victim', something more. She has a candour, a sort of matter-of-fact goodness that is hard to gainsay. (There is a scene in *The Serpent's Egg*, much reviled by the critics as an example of Bergman's ludicrous melodrama, in which a black soldier is discovered being serviced by two prostitutes in a cellar room, compared specifically to Hell. This room, and Rolf Zehetbauer was production designer on both films,

bears a striking resemblance to Ka's room, and it is a measure of her 'humanity' that it seems, for all the tawdriness, so unexceptionally normal.)

Before she dies, Ka tells Peter, who has complained of the smell, that she has lost her sense of smell, but that she can remember the scent of the seasons from her childhood, when she was taken by her Danish mother to visit her grandparents. It is an old Bergman theme. The seasons, Peter queries. 'Yes, winter—winter smelled of snow and coal stoves and damp gloves. In summer it was seaweed and ant-hills. The spring smelled of melted snow in the deep ditches and fresh birch leaves and rain. But autumn was the nicest of all—' She never finishes. Peter has dozed and she takes his head to comfort him. Even the echo of that often remembered lost paradise has the power to admit a shaft of hope. □

## The Birds

*The Falls*/Chris Auty

Three hours long, dizzily eclectic, *The Falls* (BFI) confirms Peter Greenaway's position as an inspired absurdist and experimenter. Its premise is simple. A Violent Unknown Event has struck the world, leaving behind some 19 million survivors, of whom the film briefly catalogues 92 case-histories, chosen on the apparently random basis that their surnames all begin with the letters 'fall'. Unlike the victims of nuclear catastrophe that we might imagine, however, Greenaway's survivors are marked by rather cheering afflictions: they are immortal; their world is a Babel of complex and eloquent languages—one for each victim; and the most common legacy of the holocaust is 'potagium fallitis' (!), a disease causing hypertrophy of the muscles in the arms, shoulders and back, and apparently preparing for the evolution of humans into flying creatures. There is a strong suspicion that the VUE (...view?) itself was inspired or engineered by the bird kingdom.

This Borgesian fantasy is carried through with a sardonic logic that should be familiar to those who have seen Greenaway's earlier work (*Windows*, *A Walk Through H*, *Vertical Features Remake*). Thus the random, lexical principle whereby subject names begin 'f-a-l-l' is neatly undercut by an immediate semantic connotation (*The Fall*). And if the event is 'unknown' how can it be 'violent'? Indeed, how can it be known at all? VUE victims are improbable subjects filling an impossible universe, immortal creatures who can only give birth, apparently, to mortal children. Like their predecessors in the earlier films, they flaunt their fictiveness, delight in cross-reference, smile at our confusion.

These internal ironies are equalled only by those of Greenaway's own position—as a long-standing editor for the government's rather staid 'propaganda'



arm (the Central Office of Information) whose own work plays with notions of misinformation and statistics, with imaginary populations and a world where, sardonically, the holocaust is just an intriguing memory. An enthusiast of highbrow cinema (Alain Resnais is a favourite), his films mock cultural élitism and psychological ramblings. Above all, his meticulous fascination with cartography, ornithology, linguistics and other systems is undercut by a deep-rooted and freewheeling Romanticism: 'None of those objects [in *Vertical Features Remake*] were ever manipulated. Everything was found. I never moved a dustbin three inches to improve a composition; if it didn't work, I went and found something else. It's some belief, almost mystical, that things will happen, that things come together at the right time.' Greenaway expects his films to be found and experienced by their audiences in much the same way as he himself 'found' the

images, and in his notion of a natural 'fitness', of a piercing aperçu, of coming upon a view (...VUE?), there is an undeniable trace of Wordsworthian Romanticism: both idea and language to be found in nature. And scattered throughout *The Falls* one does indeed find those images of sudden mute insight: a tarn rippling ever so quietly in an oblique light; London slumbering at dusk; the sea seen shimmering to its horizon in the night. Intimations of immortality, no less.

The specific expression of the Romantic impulse has of course changed over the years. Thus the tone of *Water Wreakets* is almost Pre-Raphaelite, while the fence-posts, trees and telephone poles of *Vertical Features Remake* accumulate into an obsessive haunting of the eye. But the film which relates most closely to *The Falls* is *A Walk Through H*, for like the later work it is organised around ornithological metaphors and a barely disguised 'religious' (animist) sub-text: the dream of flight is seen as an archetype or Idea—the dream of the soul freed to leave the body and, more heretically, of the soul aspiring to godhead. It is not coincidental that the voyager in *A Walk* is forever reliving the last seconds of his life, hovering on the brink of excursion into a new—birdlike—form; nor that in *The Falls* the holocaust survivors are halfway there—diseased, earthbound, but immortal, soul-birds in the making.

Despite this philosophical coherence, though, the form of *A Walk* is ironic and fragmentary. That of *The Falls* is doubly so: a film of 92 sketches; a film whose scores of characters and actors make minute contributions; jokes that refer to earlier Greenaway creatures (such as Van Hoyten, the evil birdkeeper of the Amsterdam zoo); to institutions both real (the BFI) and imagined (the Institute of Reclamation and Restoration). The languages and name-tags, the puns of time, place and genealogy; the in-jokes and arcane references all feed a Lewis Carroll world in which, for example, the money standard has been changed from gold to



eggs. But as diversity of forms spirals outwards (stills, documentary, live action, interview, reportage, and fairy-tale), as irony piles on irony, the whole project threatens to collapse.

That it doesn't says a great deal for Greenaway's editing skills and for the mercurial collaboration with composer Michael Nyman. Its director has suggested that *The Falls* could perhaps be treated less as an organic whole and more as an installation which one could wander in and out of. But his work would then simply become ironic game-play, a humpty-dumpty feat of librarianship, without the anarchic romanticism of his mythologies and metaphors so far. Strategically, *The Falls* has reached an impasse—a jungle of splintering discourses, a romantic text couched in ironic form.

In that sense, Greenaway's TV short, *Act of God*, made during the same period and shown on Thames TV in January, is a fascinating counter-example. Presented as a documentary on those who have been struck by lightning and survived, it cuts between interview and landscape, between statistics and fictions. The catalogue of case-histories is wilfully bizarre: an army major hit while on the Rhine,

unmarked but for tiny burn holes in his beret and shoes; an entire cricket team struck down one thundery August; a housewife scorched while on the telephone. But the film's coherence hangs less on the choice of 'real' stories and rather more on the perfect ambivalence of lightning itself—a 'violent event' that is real but incredible, empirical but magical, unknowable beforehand and unknown afterward. It is in fact the ideal correlative for Greenaway's imaginary universe, since the electric flash is simultaneously a cruel jest of Fate and an instance of supreme natural revelation, a metaphor both ironic and Romantic.

Of these two most recent works, *The Falls* of course remains the braver, a determined attempt to bring fantasy into British film-making. In the process it snipes very usefully at the structural(ist) dogmas that crippled experimental cinema in the late 70s (using 'reflexive' symbols; insisting that the spectator should 'work'; deconstructing 'the look'). *Act of God* questions older dogmas of Nature, God and Science with a dry wit and unassuming grace. Both films in fact open our eyes to new worlds; and both suggest how experimental cinema can come out of the closet... if it wants. □

his eyes wide or rhythmically nodding his head from side to side like a snake about to strike. In one set-up, Jaglom turns the tables on Norman by having Townsend unexpectedly pour a glass of water over his head to deflate further his own arrogant ego, which has just been dented by her rating of Emil as a better sexual partner.

Locations are seized with equal spontaneity: when the two 'crooks' sense that their fellow-travellers may be on to them, they get out of the car and walk in front whispering about how safe the loot is; unwittingly, they stroll into a farm field and are suddenly ankle-deep in a mob of ducks whose quacking is amplified on the soundtrack to drown the anxious, neurotic repartee of the two 'sitting ducks' themselves just as the argument threatens to become tiresome.

Earlier, in the Holiday Inn sequence, Jaglom permits himself a Godardian 'insert' as he films the group's antics from his poolside seat; though this directorial intrusion is given a context by the fact that Jaglom is playing the shadowy Mafia man who is also Jenny's lover. Compounding the family connections is Patrice Townsend (here making her debut): the fact that she is Jaglom's wife echoes the on-screen relationship of Godard and Anna Karina, rather than, say, that between Cassavetes and Gena Rowlands (where, especially in the case of *Gloria*, the movies seem to have been conceived as vehicles for the wife). The comparison between Jaglom and Cassavetes has frequently been made since the appearance of *Sitting Ducks*; and indeed there are stylistic similarities in the use of overlapping dialogue and impromptu pieces of action, but what both directors share most significantly if in varying degrees is their independence.

It is this independent status that has enabled Jaglom to pick his way judiciously through recent genre cinema, borrowing liberally from the road movie (at whose 'birth' he assisted as co-editor of *Easy Rider*) and the 'buddie' movie (whose conventions he exposes by deftly reversing and redistributing the traditional roles), while eschewing the kind of contemporary film comedy he characterises as 'costing \$30 million and aimed at the ten-year-old in everybody.' The result is seductively engaging. □

## Zack & Michael

*Sitting Ducks*/Martyn Auty

To witness the late-60s generation retreating on all fronts—whether to the Candidean conceits of *Manhattan* and *Stardust Memories*, or to the enforced compromises depicted in *Heart Beat* and *Return of the Secaucus Seven*—is to be reminded of the saving graces of American humour that range from the archly intellectual to the gently rueful. But to be teased into open laughter throughout *Sitting Ducks* (ICA Distribution) is to recall a much earlier response to movie comedy provoked by such duos as Laurel and Hardy, Abbott and Costello and, principally, Martin and Lewis. It is gratifying to discover that writer-director Henry Jaglom makes fond allusion to such seminal partnerships and, though the impulse with Michael Emil and Zack Norman is, in Jaglom's words, to allow them to 'poke each other's neuroses rather than each other's noses', the essential elements of 'innocent' horseplay and the sense of getting-away-with-it are preserved here beyond all expectation.

The keynote of this winning optimism is sounded in the catchy song 'Sunny Side Up', composed by Moose (Richard Romanus), the aimlessly ambitious song-writing chauffeur, but freely elaborated by the middle-aged buddies, Simon and Sidney (Emil and Norman), and the Mafia 'hit-women' Jenny and Leona who ride to Florida in a limousine whose tyres are packed with freshly heisted Mob money. By all the standard conventions, Moose, hired on the spur of the moment like C. W. Moss in *Bonnie and Clyde*, shouldn't make it to the end, and Simon

and Sidney should meet their nemesis on the same Florida coast where Harry Moseby was finally stranded in *Night Moves*. But Jaglom, having overcome the post-Vietnam angst of *Tracks* (where Emil and Norman served significantly as comic relief), indulges the narrative pleasure, peculiar to comedy, of 'taking them on and getting away with it'.

The daring proposition to cheat on their Mafia bosses and take off to Costa Rica with \$750,000 (the actual cost of the movie) belies the leisurely pace at which Simon and Sidney drive South, picking up en route their chauffeur, Jenny (Patrice Townsend) posing as a health-obsessed sexual adventurer, and Leona (Irene Forrest), a neurotic Holiday Inn waitress who has been fired for talking to the customers. In the course of this unusually laid-back road-movie narrative, the five take turns at the wheel, swop seats and change bedmates, exploring each other's preoccupations (chiefly sex and vitamins) in a casual and candid manner that owes much to Jaglom's improvisatory direction.

Having constructed a script outline from Emil and Norman's repartee, taped on a pocket machine over an extended period, Jaglom went on to make inspired use of 'rehearsal' takes and unscripted moments such as that when Norman climbs naked into Emil's bathtub, kissing, prodding and poking him. Emil's bewildered, blustery response is spontaneous, though perfectly calculated on the part of Jaglom (who is in reality Emil's younger brother), and provides one of the film's funniest exchanges. Indeed throughout Emil's character oscillates wildly between a beguiling egotism and a dismaying anxiety, while Norman reacts to his partner's panic by opening



Zack Norman, Richard Romanus.



# FILM REVIEWS

## 'Il n'est pas méchant . . .'

Loulou/Tom Milne

Hardly surprising, perhaps, that Maurice Pialat's work should have met with such limited distribution in Britain. Trailing through *la boue* in the wake of Zola, he makes the sort of film—'just like life'—that audiences tend to feel they have seen before and would not want to be depressed by anyway.

The plot of *Loulou* (Artificial Eye) fits this image almost to the point of parody. Walking out on André (Guy Marchand), the advertising executive with whom she has for three years shared a comfortable bourgeois-intellectual existence, Nelly (Isabelle Huppert) opts for more animal gratification by shacking up with Loulou (Gérard Depardieu). A semi-criminal layabout, preoccupied only by beer and bed, Loulou is content to let her pay the bills; and when André cynically wonders what they can possibly find in common, Nelly simply says 'He never stops!', her purr of contentment indicating that her reference is sexual. Eventually becoming pregnant by Loulou, Nelly aborts the child they both want; and in the last shot, supporting a drunken Loulou, she staggers away with him through the gutters.

But just as Zola's naturalism was illuminated by strange shafts of fantasy, so Pialat's realism is not entirely what it seems. Right from the opening scene, a system of formal oppositions and identifications comes into play, giving the film a structure that is curiously (or perhaps not so curiously, given Pialat's experience in playing the police inspector in *Que la bête meure*) reminiscent of Chabrol. And not merely because, as so often with Chabrol, the crux of the matter comes during a family dinner.

The opening shot, for instance, of a girl walking tragically to camera through the rain-glistening streets under an elevated railway, and pausing sadly (she is Dominique, Loulou's newly cast-off lover) to look back at a couple necking against a pillar, is an archetypal *film noir* image. It portends, unmistakably, a season in hell. Yet contrary to all expectations, especially as aroused by our first glimpse of Loulou staggering out of bed and hurrying to a bar, Nelly's decision to go slumming with him leads not to the darkness of despair—at least up to the sunny climax of the open air dinner party—but to light. The movement of this opening shot, with Dominique walking to camera as though pleading (as she subsequently does) with Loulou to relent, suggests another opposition: the idea that Nelly is running less to Loulou than away from her bourgeois life. Not so much in itself, as in the analogy that emerges between Dominique, hopefully proffering samples of her home cooking, and André as he repeatedly turns the conversation to artistic topics: conventional traps on which both Loulou and Nelly stolidly turn their backs.

At the same time, Pialat draws an analogy/opposition between André and Loulou. 'Il n'est pas méchant, tu sais,' murmurs an elderly concierge trying to persuade Dominique that her tears over Loulou are needless. Moments later, a friend of Nelly's uses precisely the same words to describe André in the dancehall where he first vents his jealousy. And in that same dancehall sequence (with the camera casually capturing a marvellously intricate choreography of character, movement and emotion), André usurps

the persona one might have expected Loulou to display: virile, hirsute, giving brutal rein to his passions.

What all these formal hints add up to is not merely a moral dimension imposed over the seemingly strict objectivity Pialat maintains throughout, but a *view-point* that remains keenly aware of the dangers of social simplification so often attendant upon fictional ventures into 'la boue'. First contrasted unfavourably with the unexpectedly gentle Loulou, André nevertheless emerges as an unequivocally sympathetic character. If he gives way to his jealousy in hysterically violent rages, it is not because he is a bourgeois (Pialat in fact pointedly provides him with a working-class counterpart in Loulou's psychopathic brother-in-law) so much as because he is articulate by education. Where Loulou remains inhibited by conventional formulae and what the neighbours will think in cramped quarters, André enjoys free expression amid the spacious and solid walls of his apartment.

Where the moral dimension comes into play is in defining the unbridgeable gap opened up by Nelly's pregnancy. Two sequences are crucial here, the first being one in which Nelly is visited by her brother, a chauffeur-driven young executive type who tries to pin Loulou down to a job, only to have the latter insist that he will buckle down after the baby comes. The second is the *alfresco* lunch in a rural backyard, a marvellously traditional family occasion of expansive warmth in which Nelly is introduced to Loulou's assembled relatives. Interwoven with the ambivalent emotional motifs of these two sequences—the possibility that Nelly comes to echo her brother's faintly superior smile of disbelief in face of Loulou's protestations, and that Loulou's family imperceptibly begin to sense an alien in this stranger so ill-at-ease with their hospitality—are two firm facts. One is Loulou's elation at the prospect of a child (expressed not in words, but in a fleeting gesture indicative of regal pride and pleasure which all Nelly's questioning has been powerless to elicit); and the other, the maturing of Nelly's sexual adventure into a kind of loving (which she never communicates to Loulou, in the terms he can understand, by putting her trust in him).

It isn't Nelly's fault that, failing to understand Loulou's declaration of faith, she aborts his child; for between them yawns the social gulf demarcating the middle-class principle of settling down and having a baby when ready, and the proletarian habit of being readied to settle down when the baby comes. But it is, as she seems to assume as her burden in the final shot, a tragedy of her own making. Not for nothing is the film, although following Nelly as its obvious protagonist, called *Loulou*. In French, 'Loulou' is of course the affectionate diminutive of Louis. But it also has three slang connotations—'darling', 'pooch' and 'yobbo'—which delineate all the various cross-purposes in Loulou's situation. □



'Loulou': (far right) Nelly (Isabelle Huppert) and Loulou (Gérard Depardieu).





'Atlantic City USA': Sally (Susan Sarandon) and Lou (Burt Lancaster).

## The vanished swashbuckler

*Atlantic City USA*/Tim Pulleine

Louis Malle's second American film begins with a juxtaposition. Across the courtyard of a rundown apartment building in the seaside resort of the title, an elderly man watches a young woman anoint her breasts with lemon juice; on a street in Philadelphia, a Syndicate cocaine 'drop' is intercepted by a hustling amateur. The impression is of opposing methods of address, the first sequence, sensuously accompanied by the strains of Bellini, belongs to the art movie, the second, brisk and diagrammatic, to the action film. In a superficial sense, *Atlantic City USA* (Enterprise) does fuse these two forms. But it is the randomness of conjunction between the dreamlike and the lethally matter-of-fact which points more significantly to the heart of the matter.

The watcher is Lou (Burt Lancaster), a small-time crook, now an errand boy for a numbers organiser, and effectively the kept man of Grace (Kate Reid), an old friend's widow. The watched is Sally (Susan Sarandon), a casino waitress and would-be croupier, who—reality undercutting romantic enigma—uses the lemon juice for the practical purpose of removing the smell of food. And the thief is Dave (Robert Joy), Sally's husband, who has decamped with Chrissie (Hollis McLaren), her hippie younger sister.

Dragging the naive, now pregnant girl in his wake, Dave insultingly returns to claim refuge with Sally while he seeks to cash in the cocaine. Predictably, his hubris is swiftly punished by the enforcers on his trail. In a brilliant set piece, which may perhaps stir memories of *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud*, Malle's feature début, Dave is cornered aboard a car hoist and stabbed to death. His executioners, however, still lack the cocaine. For this, by a stroke of that coincidence

which unifies the film's narrative and conceptual levels, he has entrusted for sale to Lou, following a chance encounter in which he has failed to perceive the irony in a contact's reference to the latter's criminal background. In a sequence pinpointing the movie's flavour, we watch as the men seek to deceive each other, Dave blusteringly assertive, Lou offering an implausibly colourful résumé ('Sometimes I had to kill a few people') of his purported past. The comedy of manners, with Dave as his companion's youthful alter ego, is lent a sinister undertow by our knowledge, having seen the hoodlums, of Dave's likely fate.

But with Dave out of the way, Lou is in funds, and in befriending the woman who has been his unattainable object of fantasy, though without explaining his dealings with her husband, he finds himself realising dreams of becoming a high-spending Mr Big, entertaining Sally in fancy restaurants and then becoming her lover. It is a mark, however, of the film's retention of a fallibly human frame of reference that he finds himself unable to intervene when Sally is roughed up by the pursuing thugs and that he then seeks to run out on her. It is, indeed, only by subterfuge—sardonically undercutting his new self-image, she readily persuades a bus driver that Lou is her senile father—that Sally, having stumbled on the truth, is able to prevent his departure.

On a dark street, the hoodlums confront them, and this time Lou rises to the occasion. In a spasm of decision—charismatic, certainly, but (again the human scale) hardly conventionally heroic—he shoots dead the astonished attackers with the revolver hidden in his coat pocket. Here, with a high-angle shot of the victims trapped in the headlights

of the gangsters' car, Malle momentarily reproduces the rhetoric of the *film noir*. Perhaps, too, one can detect a nod to an earlier tradition in the subsequent glimpse on a TV newscast of a marvelously pugnacious police chief who, in declaring 'Let 'em kill each other some place else, not on my turf,' seems to summon up the shade of some Warners crimebuster of the 30s. The movie as a whole, however, refuses ready-made atmospherics in favour of a quite different, daylight eccentricity.

Malle's evocation of Atlantic City, with its vast, crowded casinos, echoing boardwalk and gone-to-seed grandeur, has an empathy which reminds one that the director is an occasional documentarist. And any suspicions, fostered by the unevenness of Malle's filmography, that he is particularly dependent on the quality of his scripts, might be borne out here by his response to a notably well-ordered screenplay by John Guare. The characters' speech patterns are sometimes unobtrusively heightened to comic effect: on learning, for instance, of Sally's wish to be a croupier in Monaco, Lou is moved to respond, 'That Kelly girl from Philadelphia, she's the queen out there.'

For in a way, despite its menacing accoutrements, *Atlantic City USA* is a comedy—and an upbeat one at that. The film does not end with Lou and Sally's joyous escape from town, he proffering a \$1,000 bill in payment for a toll charge and then apologetically handing over \$100 in its place. Rather, the illusory fairy tale of the champagne-drinking celebration gives way, in the movie's clinching juxtaposition, to one grounded in reality. Having seen Sally filch the bulk of the proceeds from his wallet, Lou sends her on her way—to Monaco, maybe—with his tacit blessing, in a scene of requited love managed with unironic sentimental conviction.

The coda is jauntily reassuring. Lou returns to Grace—who, in a sub-plot consonant with the overall air of affectionate making-do, has virtually adopted the hitherto forlorn Chrissie—and together they cash in the remainder of the cocaine, which Lou has accidentally retained. We last see them, and the vignette is persuasive enough to banish any literal-minded objections about the security of Lou's future, promenading arm-in-arm along the seafront like a raffishly elegant Darby and Joan.

The last image, echoing one near the beginning, is of demolition work on an apartment block. But this time, before the building can crumple, the frame freezes—into an image defiantly and emblematically rejecting inevitability—for the credits to roll. It remains to add that while the playing is uniformly admirable, Burt Lancaster's Lou is wholly magisterial, his solid, Gabin-like bulk offset by balletic nimbleness of movement and by the inimitably musical voice. Lancaster's very presence, containing within it the ghost of a vanished swashbuckler, is—like *Atlantic City USA* itself—both elegiac and hearteningly affirmative. □



## No Bigger than Life

*Ordinary People*/Richard Combs

What is initially interesting about the critical acclaim lavished previously on *Kramer vs. Kramer* and now on *Ordinary People* is the sense that it is rushing in to fill a vacuum. Presumably only the preponderance in recent years of genre cinema, the movie-brat syndrome, could make such innately old-fashioned objects of film art seem prizeable commodities. They can be referred to, and judged by, a reality presumed to exist independently of the films themselves; therefore, the less resistance they set up as movies, the more transparently naturalistic they appear, the more valuable they are. Whatever one thinks of the new genre cinema, such implicit criteria seem a dismaying leap back into the dark ages when it was assumed that the Important Subject made the movie and not the other way round.

Looked at more closely, there are curious anomalies between the two films. Their provenance, to start with, is the opposite of what it should be. Robert Benton cut his movie teeth on the *Bonnie and Clyde* revolution in gangster pictures, before directing his own genre variations, *Bad Company* and *The Late Show*. But his *Kramer vs. Kramer* displays little acquired movie wisdom: it soaks up relevance simply because it soaks up so much of New York and a problem of known social significance. *Ordinary People*, Robert Redford's debut as director, is 'relevant' in a more general way: it is about a problem in human relationships, dramatised out of necessity but nevertheless trying hard to pretend (as its title indicates) that its characters are not dramatically distinct, particular creations of the medium. To say it is ordinary in style would be an understatement. It is stringently, at times quite awkwardly, determined not to make a move or suggest a meaning unless it is sanctioned by script and performances. Yet one somehow feels more comfortable with it as a movie than with *Kramer*. It finds its way into a tradition that stretches back through Penn (early), Kazan and Ray.

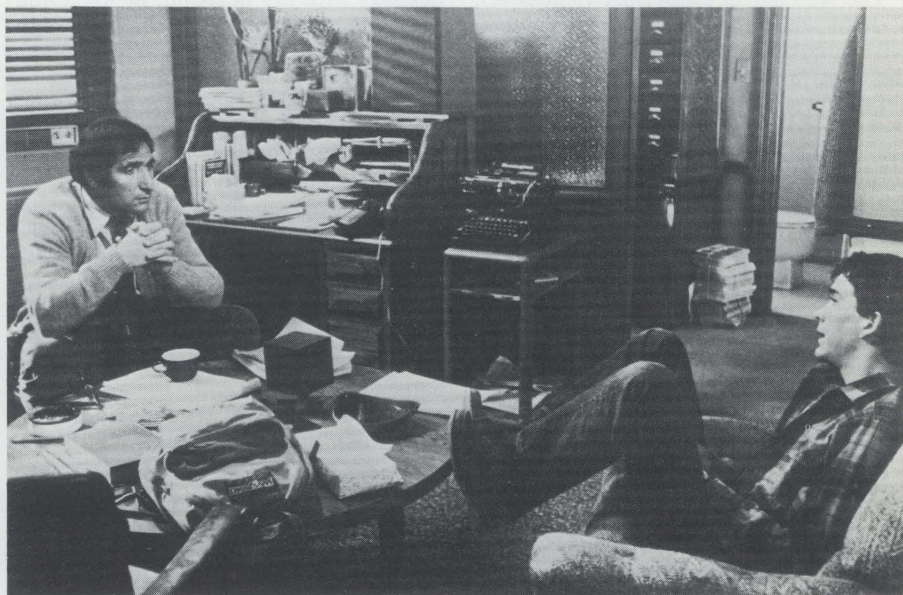
In theory, *Ordinary People* (CIC) performs the same hocus-pocus with truth and illusion as Benton's film. Its subject is emotional honesty, the vehicle psychotherapy, and the narrative passed off as just a neutral, objective means of yoking the two together. Teenager Conrad Jarrett (Timothy Hutton) has, when the film opens, just been released from hospital after a suicide attempt, provoked by his sense of guilt over a boating accident which he survived but his brother Buck didn't. His father, tax attorney Calvin (Donald Sutherland), is kindly but diffuse, 'jello and pudding' as Conrad complains. His mother, Beth (Mary Tyler Moore), is not kindly and is so unjello-like that she is emotionally brittle, unable to give Conrad support because of her attachment to Buck and

because all her energy goes in holding together her own world. Conrad sees a no-nonsense psychiatrist, Dr Berger (Judd Hirsch), who eventually provokes him into accepting: (1) the resentment that his mother has failed him underlying his guilt that he has failed her; (2) his anger at the irresponsibility of the older Buck—who always clowning, even during the fatal storm—underlying his guilt at not saving him, the favourite son; (3) the realisation that he was strong enough to hold on to the upturned boat, but his sports-hero brother wasn't, underlying his general survivor's guilt.

The psychological factors touched on during this cathartic process are as complex as the process itself is dramatically trite and predictable—inevitably so, given the way it is anchored in one incident which focuses everything in these people's lives. Redford further overburdens his case by splicing in dream flashes of the accident all the way to its ultimate explanation. What then accounts for the fascination of *Ordinary People* is the tension between this dramatic determinism and its tendency otherwise to pull away into detailed little bits of character study, emotional filigree. Partly this might be laid to its being an actors' film, directed by an actor, and partly to its need to establish a surface of unexceptional details, ordinariness, as a *modus vivendi*. It is centrifugal where the 'tug of love' in *Kramer vs. Kramer* is centripetal. Consequently, Conrad's story is less interesting than what happens tangentially to his parents, the break-up of their marriage paralleling his return to health. Actorish details matter here too. Mary Tyler Moore, shucking suburban sit-com giddiness for its repressed other side, is fine. Donald Sutherland is fuzzier, a puzzle, perhaps too amiable to make Calvin as reprehensibly weak as he is written.

Where the film begins to move outwards in this respect, suggesting a network of emotional problems that aren't all resolvable, is also where it begins to touch Kazan-Ray elements. Its complexity, its suggestiveness, remains a little rarefied, however, perhaps because it doesn't move far enough. Its sense of spiritual malaise is strangely detached from a consideration of how these people live in any other terms. One might ask by what criteria—given their level of comfort—the Jarretts are defined as 'ordinary'. This is not a matter of demanding that the film include a Marxist critique of its characters. But its analysis of family stresses and strains is resolved into too neat a bundle of symptoms. It is deracinated Laing, where *Splendour in the Grass* is already *Family Life* in the Bible belt.

By basing itself on a melodramatic premise—reinforced by such incidents as the suicide of Conrad's friend Karen—but shunning the stylistic option of melodrama, *Ordinary People* denies itself much. Redford's direction, going for a density of 'real' behaviour, is almost charmingly conservative, and the film works best when what it is about is subtly implicit in script and performances: the excellent scene of family photograph-taking, when Beth is made uncomfortable by being posed alone with her son, or the scene where her nervousness is manifested as abstraction, doubly thoughtless, while Conrad struggles to make conversation about his schoolwork. When the subject is made explicit, the result is bad Kazan: Conrad talking about the dog he and his brother were never allowed to have, Beth talking across him about the messiness of a neighbour's dog, and Conrad finally venting his distress by barking. *Ordinary People*, consequently, has a closeness but not much expressiveness of texture. Beth Jarrett shares the problems but not the appurtenances of the mother in *Marnie*, which may make her more 'real' in human terms but somewhat limits her significance on the screen. □



'Ordinary People': Psychiatrist (Judd Hirsch) and patient (Timothy Hutton).



# BOOK REVIEWS

## Questioning Documentary

### THE DOCUMENTARY CONSCIENCE

by Alan Rosenthal

University of California Press/\$19.95

To call a book *The Documentary Conscience* is to acknowledge an important fact: that the roots of documentary lie in a quasi-moral position adopted from choice by its practitioners. This position consists in a certain attitude towards film's images—a respect for their provenance. It represents itself in questions about what relationships are possible between image and prior world (i.e. how films should be shot) and what structuring methods may make such relationships available to the viewer as components of a film's meaning (i.e. how they should be edited); and the differences between schools of documentary are the differences between answers to these questions.

For the viewer, there are reciprocal questions which concern the ways in which a film may be construed so that its significance will rest upon, or at least not conflict with, the granting to the images of what appears to be their proper status. But one factor which has differentiated the schools of documentary has been the degree to which they have recognised the role of the viewer as being, in this sense, problematical; and it is this, more than anything else, which has divided traditions which in Britain we identify as those of Grierson and Cavalcanti. In the Grierson tradition, which does not on the whole posit an active viewer and therefore lends itself to the idea of truth as something which may be 'communicated', the documentary conscience elides readily with social conscience pure and simple.

It is within this tradition—not, certainly, a dishonourable one—that Alan Rosenthal's book stands. A collection of 29 interviews with a diversity of film-makers by someone whose questions show no sign of a wish to bully, it may offer the appearance of an enquiry not structured by preconception; but the clues are there. Thus when, in his introduction, Rosenthal excludes from his concerns a study of 'interactions between documentaries and their viewers', he adds that such studies 'will bring to bear findings from perceptual psychology, information theory and various social sciences'; in other words, the truths that matter about the viewer are those of predictive analysis. And while his repudiation of theory may be greeted with some relief at a time when 'theory' has become synonymous

with 'theology', it does seem to have set uncomfortable limits on what may be said.

In the first chapter, Jerome Kuehl talks lucidly and wittily about the care taken by Thames Television's *World at War* team to ensure correct identification of archive footage. But it should surely be acknowledged that such concern would greatly have surprised—though it might also have pleased—the original camera operators, schooled as they were to the understanding that their material would undergo an irreversible process of generalisation by its incorporation into a film, and that any subsequent recognition in it of the circumstances of its shooting would be no more than the glance passed between illicit lovers in a public thoroughfare. We may wholly approve of the stand taken by Kuehl and his colleagues, yet still find it interesting that the demands of historical veracity should have led to what was in a lesser respect an a-historical approach: a reading-back of the ethics of *vérité* into the perception of *vérité* material, and an attempt to have the audience share it.

Frequently one feels this book touching against an unseen perimeter. Jeremy Sandford, comparing the play *Destiny* with the documentary *The National Front*, says of the former, 'I felt horrified and alarmed but also that sense of "the pity of it all" which seems to be often present in literature and seldom in documentary.' (Is this inevitably the case? And if so, why?) Robert Vas, speaking of film-making as a bridge between the Eastern and Western components of his experience, adds, 'And I want you, the viewer, to know that I am trying to build this bridge.' (How must film be put together if it is to promote this knowledge?) Jill Godmilow takes a firmly anti-sociological line: 'I am not interested in establishing the ... "objective truth" about a situation ... I'm presenting a human being who has a story to tell and I don't have anything to prove.' (One would welcome a discussion of whether this position and its contrary are mutually exclusive, or merely entail different uses of film language—in which case, what are these differences and how do they reflect back upon the film-makers' responsibility to the material's source?)

To be fair, these limitations may be largely those of oral discourse; but they are emphasised by superimposition until they become a significant part of the message. Neither does it help that, once we are past the *World at War* section, the overwhelming majority of the interviewees are directors. What they have to say is usually interesting, often entertaining, and occasionally, as in Barbara Kopple's account of the making of *Harlan County*, terrible. It is no fault of the

## Grierson on the Movies

Edited with an Introduction by Forsyth Hardy

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## BOOK REVIEWS

individuals—or no fault of most of them—if the catalogue of their exploits begins to read like the *Lives of the Saints*. But it might have broken the devotional spell, as well as opening up a greater variety of approaches to his preferred subject matter, if Mr Rosenthal had talked to some of the countless 'technicians' who spend their lifetimes trying to produce worthwhile work, sometimes in the face of their directors' indifference, incompetence or pusillanimity, and whose efforts maintain our general film and television culture at a considerably higher level than it would otherwise achieve. Ellen Hovde's vigorous discussion of the editing of *Grey Gardens* ought at least to have alerted him to the possibility.

DAI VAUGHAN

## Secular Cathedrals

### CATHEDRALS OF THE MOVIES

by David Atwell

Architectural Press/£12.95

### THE PICTURE HOUSE IN EAST ANGLIA

by Stephen Peart

Terence Dalton/£7.95

In his preface to *Cathedrals of the Movies*, David Atwell calls the cinema 'the most important new building type of the twentieth century.' In 1900, he points out, there were no custom-built examples anywhere in Britain; by 1940 there were 5,500, serving every major town. The type has hardly survived into the second half of the century, as the author's mournful roll-call of demolitions and closures indicates. Yet no one reading the attractive pages of his book, along with Stephen Peart's complementary study of cinemas in East Anglia, could ever deny the architectural uniqueness of Britain's secular cathedrals, or their power to attract and satisfy their audiences, at least until the 1950s.

Picture after picture testifies to the bold insouciance of designers, who ran through all centuries and countries in their search for structural ideas and decorative motifs, and thrust their creations into the drab horizons of suburban high streets. Pedestrians who gazed upwards outside the Grosvenor, Rayner's Lane, Harrow, found an Art Deco elephant's trunk bearing down upon them; patrons of the Rialto in Hall Green, Birmingham, watched Jack Hulbert or Greta Garbo in the company of charioteers at some past Olympic Games, thundering in oil paint round the proscenium arch. Moorish villages sprang up inside

cinemas at Ealing and Finsbury Park; a half-timbered manor house appeared at Chesterfield, to keep the famous parish church company (though it clashed with everything else). With the construction of its Granada, grandly designed by Theodore Komisarjevsky, Tooting was treated to the glory of Venice and the Italian Renaissance, complete with cloisters, abundantly decorated arches and murals of courtly figures.

The illustrations (and text) also make clear that Britain's cinemas were often inaugurated and maintained with the pomp and reverence due to traditional cathedrals. Stephen Peart's thorough research indicates that religious dignitaries occasionally appeared at opening ceremonies alongside lord mayors, sheriffs and businessmen ('May Thy spirit rest this day and forever on all who gather in this picture house,' intoned the local canon at the Haymarket, Norwich, in 1921). Commissionaires patrolled the foyers and aisles in quasi-military dress, and posed for special photographs (duly reproduced), proudly spread out before the cinema entrance. There was music from the organist, who could rise from the pit in a tumult of flashing lights and sound effects; there were dainty luncheons served among potted palms in the restaurant, dainty dancing in the ballroom.

Both books provide a valuable, detailed and affectionate analysis of this vanished world. Atwell, trained as an architect himself, focuses on the work of individual designers and the repertoire of styles at their command—the plush manner of Edwardian theatres, the wildly exotic 'atmospherics', the sleekly modern (tinged with Art Deco), and the confident synthesis represented by Oscar Deutsch's Odeon circuit, which seemed to grace every arterial roundabout of the land. He writes with enthusiasm but not with blinkers. He knows full well when a building is aesthetically horrendous (such as the demolished Marble Arch Regal, a would-be Roman amphitheatre and 'a piece of monumental vulgarity'); though he also knows that a cinema of dubious character is far preferable to the Regal's current replacement—an auditorium crouching inside an office block—or, indeed, to no cinema at all.

Stephen Peart, a film editor at Anglia Television (whose Norwich premises housed the region's first public exhibition of 'animated photographs' in January 1897), covers a smaller geographical area but from a wider perspective. His prose is ungainly and occasionally ungrammatical, yet he is undoubtedly successful in capturing the day to day pleasures and hazards of running a cinema in the industry's pioneer and golden days. We read of impoverished children paying for admission



with jam jars and rabbit skins, and fat boys employed to squat on gas-bags to increase pressure and keep the projection machinery working; we hear much of F. H. Cooper, the growth of his cinema circuit and his presidency of the Cinematograph Exhibitors Association.

Inevitably, both books also shed sad light on the decline of the industry. Appendices list surviving and demolished cinemas, and note the occasional bizarre transformation (one cinema in Soham, Cambridgeshire, now operates as an intensive unit for rearing poultry). But perhaps the most eloquent testimony to the decline lies in the recent photographs of cinema exteriors, which repeatedly catch these proud buildings on days when they're advertising soft porn, TV spin-offs and other dreary trivia. Judging

by its splendidly ornate but tasteless interior, the Hackney Pavilion would seem to be the spiritual home of well-cushioned fare like *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*. But what title do we find advertised outside, understandably lurking in the entrance shadows? *Carry On at Your Convenience*. For it isn't only the building type that has fallen on hard times since the 50s: the films which could fill the vast auditoriums and echo their visual flamboyance dwindled away long before most of the cinemas themselves. Only once does a cinema in these books seem better served by contemporary fare. The Southall Palace, with its pagoda roofs and decorative dragons, opened its doors in 1929 with the decidedly British *Blackmail*; today, it shows Asian films.

GEOFF BROWN

## LETTERS

### Colour Fading

SIR,—We have read the article 'Colour Problem' (SIGHT AND SOUND, Winter 1980/81) with particular interest, because although we have been aware, with all producers and distributors, of the fading problems of the negative-positive colour processes, it has been our good fortune, largely by chance, to have escaped its worst aspect, that of colour deterioration of the camera original.

Producers of educational films in the USA and most of the very small number in this country were since the end of the last World War and until about 1959 obliged by necessity to shoot their films on 16mm reversal camera stock—no satisfactory negative stock was available. When both Eastman Colour Negative and an improved softer gradation camera stock (Eastman) Ektachrome Commercial reversal (intended to replace Kodachrome reversal for professional use) became available, most producers used the latter because it would intercut with Kodachrome and because stock-shot Kodachrome material could be readily used without complication in new productions. In fact we used some Kodachrome material shot in 1945 in a recent Ektachrome Commercial production, and apart from the higher contrast to be expected there was a good colour match and no noticeable deterioration or fading in the 1945 scenes when release prints were made.

As regards prints, it has been the practice of our American distributors for many years to provide purchasing authorities with reversal prints of educational films, made from reversal intermediates, because of their proven colour stability. None of the reversal duplicates (i.e. prints) made by our laboratories over many years from each new pro-

duction (to assist in grading the internegatives to be made from the masters and then used for release printing) show signs of fading, although prints from the internegatives and the latter themselves (to a lesser extent) show considerable fading after some years. This does not happen as rapidly as is reported in your article, doubtless because 16mm prints are not subjected to such intense light-sources as are 35mm prints when projected. Nevertheless 'shelf-fading' occurs after about five years, when the first signs are to be noticed. We will of course provide reversal release prints to order, but in view of financial cuts in recent years the sale of educational films in their traditional 16mm form has almost been replaced by the provision of videocassette versions, which are not expected to fade.

It seems remarkable to us that the proven colour stability inherent in the reversal colour process has not brought about its adoption in 35mm production.

Yours faithfully,

PETER BOULTON

Director,

Boulton-Hawker Films Ltd.

Hadleigh, nr. Ipswich, Suffolk.

SIR,—I read with interest your fascinating article on the 'Colour Problem', and am writing to suggest a possible line of development which might provide a solution to the problem of making a storeable, permanent record which would not suffer from deterioration over time—and from which showable copies could be made when needed.

What I suggest may be the solution is to take the idea of 'separation' to its ultimate point—to separate the 'image' (pictures and sound) from the 'substance' (film base and dyes, etc)—and produce a digital



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## LETTERS

record of the image which can be stored on any medium convenient, such as on disc or even tape, though this has its own storage problems. In theory you could even store it on paper. The point of this is that with a digital recording, which effectively breaks down all the information stored into binary code, the retrieval process needs only to determine whether the record shows a 0 or a 1 at any point, to be able to reconstitute a perfect image, with no loss or noise. The recording 'medium' on which the data is stored can thus undergo a considerable degree of physical deterioration *without impairing the legibility of the record.*

The processes involved in preparing the record would be:

1. Conversion of the sound and visual information recorded on the film image to a suitable sequential form;
2. Encoding the information into binary digits;
3. Recording the digital information on a durable medium;
4. Playback on appropriate equipment to read the digital record and re-present it as sound and video which can either be displayed on an appropriate video system or reprinted on to colour film for cinema projection.

The technology for all these processes is well-established and commercially available; there will be some loss of image definition in Step 1, but this could be minimised by the use of an extra high definition scanning pattern to make the original video transfer—say 1,000 lines or more. Sound quality should not be a problem, since the equipment will have a higher capability than the photographic recording it is transcribing. All of this can be done with conventional telecine equipment.

For encoding the telecine signal into binary and recording it on to disc one would need to use the processes and equipment developed for this purpose by the makers of video-disc systems such as Philips; again the technology is well-developed—though if one were to use an extra high definition scan, the equipment for recording and playback would need modification to write and read the record correctly.

For film presentation, a film print could be prepared from the digital record using established technology such as 'Vidtronics' or 'Image Transform' to make a high-quality, brand new print for exhibition with the added advantage of using the available electronic means to achieve correct colour balance, etc.

Apart from offering the possibility of 'no-loss' storage for the perishable film image, transferring to a digital record could also save a great deal of space. A 12-inch video disc, for instance, can provide up to an hour's video (and sound) playback—that is equivalent to say five hours' worth in the same space as would be occu-

ried by a 2,000-foot can—running time 20 minutes.

Incidentally, though video tape has not been around long enough to reveal all the storage problems that may arise with magnetic video recording materials, if a magnetic medium were used to store a digital video record, it would be possible to transcribe it from an 'old' magnetic disc or tape on to a new one without loss of information or additional noise as long as the digital record (0 or 1) was distinguishable. So in theory one could preserve the record for ever. (The Philips type of disc is not magnetic, but reflective, so this particular problem wouldn't arise.)

It all looks quite promising—on paper; but what about the costs? They would certainly be high for making the 'one-off' copies that must form the bulk of archive copying. But perhaps this cost might be reduced by sharing it among archives—producing in fact not one copy but several for major archives around the world; or perhaps even (where permitted) making copies for public sale, replayable on domestic video players. And of course the cost per unit would reduce over time as more films were copied.

Film purists may perhaps be shocked at the idea of using some other medium than film to preserve the record of the past; and one must accept that film as film still needs protection and preservation. But perhaps the methods I have proposed may be more appropriate for preserving the *image*, which could thus live on long after the substance has perished beyond recall. I hope so.

Yours faithfully,  
ALEC WORSTER  
Ogilvy & Mather,  
London W.C.2

## Edinburgh Festival

SIR,—The particular direction taken in the conversation between Simon Perry and me (published in the Winter issue) led to an important omission which I would like to rectify. I refer, of course, to the crucial contribution made to the Edinburgh International Film Festival by Murray Grigor, director of the Festival from 1967-72, and an invaluable supporter during my period as director.

I would appreciate very much the opportunity to acknowledge the major role Murray played in the regeneration of the Festival.

Yours faithfully,  
LYNDA MYLES  
Pacific Film Archive,  
Berkeley, California.

## The Elephant Man

SIR,—I must take issue with two points from John Pym's otherwise excellent review of *The Elephant Man* (SIGHT AND SOUND, Winter 1980/81). Firstly, Pym asserts that Merrick committed suicide. There is no evidence, whether



from the writings of Treves (which, despite recent literary industry, remains the only source of first-hand information) or, to my mind, from the film, that this was so.

Secondly, Pym says that Treves' admission to Merrick that he could not cure him was inhuman and a denial of the 'basis of his calling'. Surely the compassion and concern evinced by Treves, at a time when such attitudes to the incurably disabled were rare, are a witness to Treves' humanity. The real inhumanity would have been to claim, falsely, that cure was possible.

Yours faithfully,  
(Dr) PAUL WILLIAMS  
Institute of Psychiatry,  
London S.E.5.

## War Correspondents

SIR—Since writing my article in *SIGHT AND SOUND* (Autumn 1980), I have found some new information on Frederic Villiers and John Benett-Stanford.

Benett-Stanford was a member of the well-established family of Stanford of Preston Manor, near Brighton. Known to the locals as 'Mad Jack', he was, to say the least, somewhat eccentric. Amongst his more innocuous amusements was, as the culmination to an evening's drinking, to have himself carried round the grounds of his estate in a coffin until he shouted to be let out. His interest in mortality seems to have been extensive: in the cellar of his house he had a gallows and noose erected from which a skeleton was suspended. Of more direct relevance to the history of cinematography is the probability that he was something of a faker. Amongst the property he left at his death are a series of medals for gallantry. Yet, according to official records, he was never awarded any of them. In other

words, he awarded the medals to himself!

In the light of this, the claim in various photographic journals of late in 1898 that Benett-Stanford had the only ciné camera at Omdurman must be viewed with some suspicion. Suspicion increases when one finds no mention of his supposed filming in any of his reports of Omdurman in the *Western Morning News* (for which he was war correspondent) nor in a lecture about the battle which he delivered on his return to England.

More evidence that Frederic Villiers had a ciné camera at Omdurman emerges from a note in *Photographic News*, 12 August 1898. On the other hand, in the same journal for 4 June 1897 doubt seems to be thrown on Villiers' account of his filming the Greco-Turkish war.

The history of the early cinema is plagued by exaggerations, inaccuracies and downright lies. It would perhaps be unreasonable to expect that Villiers and Benett-Stanford should be exceptions to this tradition.

Yours faithfully,  
STEPHEN BOTTOMORE  
London N.W.1.

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

CHRIS AUTY is Film Editor for *Time Out*. . . QUENTIN FALK is Co-Editor of *Screen International*. . . JON JOST's most recent film is *Lampenfever*; he is at present working in Britain. . . CHAIM LITEWSKI is a postgraduate film student at the Polytechnic of Central London. . . ALAN STANBROOK is Finance Editor of the *Economist*. . . P. L. TITTERINGTON writes and lectures on philosophy and the arts. . . BRIAN WINSTON is Associate Professor of Film at New York University School of the Arts.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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UNITED ARTISTS for *Raging Bull*, *The Big Sleep*, *Heaven's Gate*.  
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NFA STILLS COLLECTION for *Triumph of the Will*, *A Boat Leaving Harbour*, *Dial M for Murder*.

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## ●DEATH WATCH

(Contemporary)

Bertrand Tavernier's first English-language film turns out something of a companion piece to *Fahrenheit 451* in that both deal with a science-fiction subject in a setting that seems uncomfortably neither here nor there. Truffaut did in the end make out a case for treating his projected world in terms of intellectual whimsy—a strange, artificial, uninhabitable environment. Tavernier, unfortunately, is split right down the middle. He wants us to respond to his people as if they were real, to find their predicament as touching as the crises of confidence suffered by his more familiar Gallic characters. But he is not sure on what level to treat the sci-fi premises of his story, and ends up fudging most of the questions it raises. His projected future is a rather blurred image of the present: everything looks the same, except that death has been banished by medical science, and the media consequently have latched on to a new kind of soap opera, the 'death watch'. Harvey Keitel is the human camera assigned to stick close to the supposedly fatally ill Romy Schneider. They both finally rebel against their exploitation, but in the context of some intellectual wool-gathering (Max Von Sydow presiding over a refuge in the West of Scotland) that looks as if Tavernier was trying to get back to more familiar territory.

## ●POPEYE (Disney)

In search of his lost Pappy, Popeye, the vigorous, mumbly self-absorbed Robin Williams, rows in from the world's tossed ocean to the blessed port of Sweethaven, another of Robert Altman's microcosmic communities (this time a jumble of boarded shacks perched on the side of a precipitous Maltese cliff). What follows is Altman and his troupe on course and at their most unbuttoned: a musical by Harry Nilsson, that isn't quite a musical so scatterbrained are the characters; an adaptation by Jules Feiffer of E. C. Segar's comic characters, in which an affirmative keynote—splendidly sustained in the final sequence when Popeye bests the villainous Bluto, rescues his Pappy and retrieves his lost baby treasures—is forever sliding down Altmanesque byways. The founding Sweet Pea can predict the outcome of toy horse races; and his gift is a measure of the adult wish-fulfilment which buoys this agreeable children's fantasy. It is hard to imagine anyone but Shelley Duvall as the conchcrake Olive Oyl. (Ray Walston, Paul L. Smith.)

## ●THE STORY OF THE LATE CHRYSANTHEMUMS (Cinegate)

One of the emblematic chrysanthemums of Mizoguchi's title is of course his self-knowing heroine, sturdy, upright, but subject to the fateful process of the seasons. This nursemaid to a sprawling self-important theatrical family in transitional, 19th century Japan sacrifices herself in the outwardly melodramatic style of a Victorian novel (with the hero often clad in cape and deerstalker) for the career of her lover, the family's woebegone adopted son, who through her transforms himself into a great 'female' actor in the kabuki theatre. Made in 1939, in reaction to the war and as part of an unfinished trilogy, this authentic tragedy survives in a sadly dilapidated state. Still evident, however, is the glory of Mizoguchi's style (he put it among his first wholly personal films): not only his use of the sequence shot, but also his less often remarked mastery of the eloquent and perfectly judged fade. A veil of unspoken disapproval falls with the fade at the end of a magnificently naturalistic scene (one of several which offset the kabuki sequences) in which the actor and the maid are caught by the family matriarch sharing a watermelon in, of all places, the kitchen. (Shotaro Hanayagi, Kakuko Mori.)

## ●SUPERMAN II

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Taking the technological triumphs of its predecessor as given, *Superman II* works its magic on the collective consciousness of pre-Reagan America, subjugating a worried President to the capricious ransoming will of the evil Zod, crushing détente and denting every piece of hallowed American iconography, from Mount Rushmore to the Marlboro pack, in one climactic struggle between the Man of Steel and the rival super-powers. Reviving the experience and exuberance of the 60s pop art tradition, Richard Lester allows Superman the full range of comic-strip emotions and includes judicious helpings of generic and self-parody. With Superman 'humanised' and stripped of his powers (in order to marry Lois Lane) throughout the mid-section of the film, the lion's share of the knowing humour passes to Gene Hackman's much improved Lex Luthor. (Christopher Reeve, Ned Beatty.)

## ANY WHICH WAY YOU CAN

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Clint Eastwood and Clyde, the orangutan companion who is made a gift of the film, reprise their send-up of the buddy movie in *Every Which Way But Loose*. This one is just as personable and even looser, but a poor substitute for Eastwood's own films as director. (Ruth Gordon, Sondra Locke; director, Buddy Van Horn.)

## BLOOD BEACH (Miracle)

Sucking down and snapping up the unwary, an unseen, low-budget 'thing' lurks beneath a California beach. This modest, agreeable exercise is distinguished by its comic-horror assurance and by the presence of Burt Young as a slobbish city detective out of his element in the bland sunshine. (David Huffman, Marianna Hill; director, Jeffrey Bloom.)

## BLOOD FEUD (ITC)

Relatively conventional material for Lina Wertmüller, a fancy dress 1920s Sicilian melodrama with Sophia Loren playing her vengeful widow to the hilt. Essentially hollow at the centre, the movie boasts an enjoyably confident surface panache. (Marcello Mastroianni, Giancarlo Giannini.)

## THE CAT AND THE CANARY

(Gala)

The old comedy-thriller warhorse trotted out yet again in a version stuffed with second-string stars and liberally tinged with camp. A nice Lyceum performance by Wendy Hiller, but pointlessness prevails. (Honor Blackman, Daniel Massey, Olivia Hussey; director, Radley Metzger.)

## COAL MINER'S DAUGHTER

(CIC)

Sissy Spacek gets right under the skin of country singer Loretta Lynn in Michael Apted's handsomely evocative tatters-to-fame bio-pic. Like our heroine, the tone is understated and affectingly straight talking. (Tommy Lee Jones, Beverly D'Angelo.)

## DEMON (Barber)

A Larry Cohen horror-sci-fi thriller (originally entitled *God Told Me To*) in which the Deity's representative on Earth is reincarnated not just once but twice. Catholic guilt, urban horror and family skeletons proliferate just as fast. Wild, woolly, but compulsive viewing. (Tony Lo Bianco, Sandy Dennis, Sylvia Sidney.)

## THE GREAT SANTINI

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Robert Duvall is back as a gung-ho marine, now suffering the crisis of being a 'warrior without a war.' The film is truculent and sentimental by turns, awkwardly attempting both to psychoanalyse and celebrate his military madness. (Blythe Danner, Michael O'Keefe; director, Lewis John Carlino.)

## HEAD OVER HEELS

(United Artists)

Writer-director Joan Micklin Silver avoids many of the clichés inherent in her title by coaxing full-blooded performances from her lovelorn, only half-adult and surpassingly 'ordinary' principals, John Heard and Mary Beth Hurt. A soft-centred but often spikily funny Midwestern love story.

## THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING WOMAN

(CIC)

A dispiriting comedy 'suggested' by Richard Matheson's brilliant fantasy, with the shrinkage now caused by a new perfume on the market. Endless satirical digs at the consumer society feebly labour the obvious. (Lily Tomlin, Charles Grodin, Ned Beatty; director, Joel Schumacher.)

## THE JAZZ SINGER

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Updated but visually old-fashioned remake aimlessly directed by Richard Fleischer, trading on the doubtful reputation of the Vitaphone original. Neil Diamond débuts as the struggling singer-songwriter who breaks with his cantor father, heads for the Coast and realises the American dream at the expense of friends and family. You ain't heard nothing. (Laurence Olivier.)

## THE LONG GOOD FRIDAY

(Handmade Films)

A fashionably violent transplant of contemporary American gangsterisms to the British scene. Sleek and slick, with souped-up direction matching a pounding score, it is as faceless as any TV cop series. (Bob Hoskins, Helen Mirren, Eddie Constantine; director, John MacKenzie.)

## MELVIN AND HOWARD

(CIC)

A film about money, relationships and the American Dream—but so likeably understated that you'd hardly notice. After a close encounter between Melvin (John Doe) and Howard (Hughes), fluid direction and excellent performances guide the film down the byways of marriage, work and gameshows. The result is a treat. (Paul Le Mat, Jason Robards; director, Jonathan Demme.)

## THE MIRROR CRACK'D

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Massively old-fashioned all-star Agatha Christie adaptation, set in a Pinewood-style Kentish village in Coronation Year, and looking as if it had been made then as well. Embarrassingly overstated caricatures of Hollywood types, and a woefully inadequate treatment of the literary whodunit. (Angela Lansbury, Geraldine Chaplin, Tony Curtis; director, Guy Hamilton.)

## MY BODYGUARD

(Fox)

Resting securely on its three central performances, this impressive directorial début of actor/producer Tony Bill engagingly trips through the growing pains of adolescent friendships. Its resonances easily outweigh budgetary/content limitations. (Chris Makepeace, Adam Baldwin, Matt Dillon, Ruth Gordon.)

## PHOBIA (Barber)

John Huston's contribution to the psycho-killer cycle turns out dismayingly faceless and slackly plotted. Hints of Huston's accustomed playfulness are drowned out by solemn psychoanalysis and acting-by-numbers performances. (Paul Michael Glaser, John Colicos.)

## PRIVATE BENJAMIN

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

A vehicle for Goldie Hawn, its star and executive producer, Howard Zieff's galumphing comedy, about the trials of a widowed Jewish princess who is tested by the 'New Army' before finding true liberation, strikingly fails to reconstitute old boot-camp material. (Eileen Brennan, Armand Assante.)

## THE REIGN OF NAPLES

(Cinegate)

Werner Schroeter's epic on 30 years of post-war Italian history charts the traumatic lives of two slum-dwelling families. Despite rigorous attempts to recount 'public' and 'private' histories simultaneously, a handful of operatic, Felliniesque characters and images reduce the surrounding neo-realist settings to so much rubble. (Liana Trouché.)

## SPHINX (Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Lesley-Anne Down singlehandedly discovers a lost tomb in the Valley of the Kings, only to lose it stumbling between a hopelessly fated love affair and countless stereotyped villains. John Byrum's extraordinarily banal script reduces the proceedings to glossy near-comedy. (Frank Langella, Maurice Ronet, John Gielgud; director, Franklin J. Schaffner.)

## STIR CRAZY

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

An object lesson for paranoid New Yorkers about what could happen to them outside the perimeters of Manhattan. Gene Wilder and Richard Pryor find themselves in *Deliverance*/Cool Hand Luke territory, and the film turns into an engagingly shaggy-dog prison break comedy. (JoBeth Williams; director, Sidney Poitier.)

## TRIBUTE (Fox)

Jack Lemmon repeats the role he created in the theatre in this essentially unreconstructed adaptation of Bernard Slade's play about a big-hearted Broadway agent facing terminal illness and trying to reconcile himself with his college boy son. Some good wisecracks and affecting moments are ultimately engulfed in a tide of sentimentality. (Lee Remick, Robby Benson; director, Bob Clark.)

## UNION CITY (Mainline)

A strikingly photographed first feature by Mark Reichert, about a man hounded to self-destruction after accidentally 'killing' another and hiding the body. But the script's attempts to expand the thriller aspects of Cornell Woolrich's story into alienation effects don't entirely work. (Dennis Lipscomb, Deborah Harry.)



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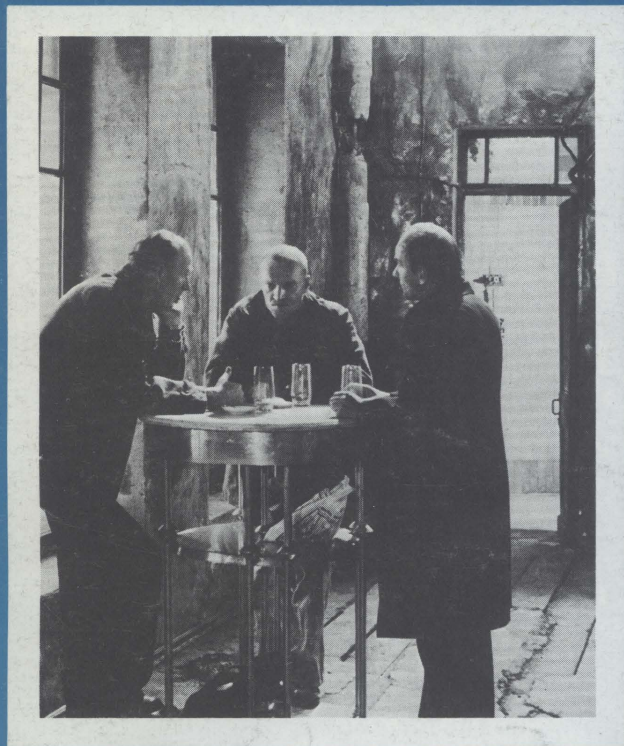
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